

SHOEBRIDGE

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Different leanings

● The research company Nielsen Online generated some media coverage earlier this month with a report that said Australians' use of the internet had surpassed their television use for the first time. It was an interesting finding, but one marketers should largely ignore.

Australians spent an average of 13.7 hours a week surfing the internet last year, up from 12.5 hours in 2006 and 8.9 hours in 2005, Nielsen says. In comparison, time spent watching TV – Nielsen did not specify whether it meant free-to-air or pay TV so presumably it was referring to both – moved from 13.2 hours in 2005 to 13.8 hours in 2006 and 13.3 hours last year.

Nielsen executive Tony Marlow said that while Australians were consuming more than one medium at the same time – for example, 58 per cent of people use the internet and watch TV simultaneously – 2007 marked the first time an increase in internet usage had not been accompanied by an increase in TV viewing.

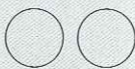
Marlow concluded that development was "a possible early warning sign that we are approaching the media saturation point". He said that when that point is reached, it will become difficult for people to take on any extra media activity without sacrificing something else.

Before marketers become too excited about the idea of people being crammed with media and abandoning some media, including TV, they need to remember a simple rule of media that Nielsen's executives appear to have overlooked: all media are not the same.

The internet is a very different medium to TV in terms of how people use it and relate to it. The internet is a "lean forward" medium, that is, people are actively engaged with it (often leaning forward in their chairs while they use it) and are, in most cases, looking for specific information or a specific website. TV is a "lean back" medium. It is a passive medium. The ability to sit or lean back and let it wash over you is a main part of its appeal.

The Nielsen report also does not address the issue of how people respond to advertising on the internet and TV. It is easy to avoid advertisements in both media. But unlike TV, the internet gives people the ability to remove ads by clicking away those annoying pop-up ads. Other internet ads, such as banners and search ads on websites such as Google, are less intrusive than the commercials that interrupt TV programs and therefore easier to ignore.

There is no doubt that the internet has become a pervasive medium and that it has taken a big chunk of people's media time. But marketers need to consider how people use different media before they start shuffling their money around.



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