

AUDIENCES, SEGMENTS OR PEOPLE?

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We hear about audiences continuously: we also hear about targeting and understanding them better. If this is true, can anyone tell me why so many marketers and agencies alike have decided that audiences aren't, in fact, human beings – more often calling them segments instead? Now, I fully endorse segments but not when they seem to replace the people they represent. I've been in too many meetings where people are reduced to two dimensional statistics which inevitably eliminate the human behind them.

Take financial service advertising: there's no better case of a target audience not being treated like real people. Seriously – even IFAs watch *The Inbetweeners*, go to the cinema, read blogs, yet are subjected to some of the most lazily dated clichés, visual metaphors and copy around. Not surprisingly, the target audience bins most of this stuff, and the client's time and money is wasted.

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We need to get back to treating audiences like people. If you don't know what I mean, trek along to a discussion group and instead of getting your coffee and helping yourself to the predictable

Smörgåsbord of samosas, Parma ham and quiche – listen to the warm up. This is the part where people tell you what they're doing, what they watched last night and often what ads they like. Too frequently, this bit of real life insight is ignored. And yet, it's this insight which has the greatest potential for transforming the relationship between advertiser and audience.

Advertising has always been a contract between audience and advertiser: to gain audience attention for your message you need to give something in return – entertainment, information, stimulus. But if you've removed the human from the audience, you don't know what will get their attention.

The new dogs of media have grasped this old trick perfectly: if you don't reward your online audience, you won't get retweeted, blogged about, or go viral.

When people are scrutinising their spend more and more – it's our job to understand what they're looking for - what makes them laugh, what makes them cry – doing this well is our only chance for success.