

# PPM<sup>TM</sup> Rating Distortion & Rating Bias Handbook

*Arbitron PPM<sup>®</sup> Special Station Activities Guidelines  
for Radio Stations*

## Introduction

The radio industry relies on radio ratings research for estimates of the size and composition of radio audiences. Station activities that undermine the credibility of this system of audience measurement have the potential to undermine both the perceived value of radio as an advertising medium and the credibility of radio as an honest, indispensable provider of information and entertainment.

To help maintain the integrity of radio listener estimates, Arbitron has developed Special Station Activities guidelines in cooperation with radio broadcasters, advertisers, and other industry groups. These guidelines are intended to help radio broadcasters avoid activities that have the potential to bias survey participants or distort survey results.

This handbook outlines Arbitron's Special Station Activities guidelines and provides examples that radio broadcasters, advertisers, and other users of Arbitron's listener estimates may find helpful. The handbook does not attempt, however, to provide an exhaustive code of conduct. The creativity of radio broadcasters and the ever-changing nature of the radio industry prevent any handbook from providing an all-encompassing list of activities to be avoided. Rather, the handbook provides guidance to those seeking to preserve the value of listener estimates as a tool for decision making.

## Preface

Additional sources of information available to Arbitron subscribers include the *Arbitron Radio Description of Methodology* and the "Rating Distortion/Rating Bias Policies and Procedures" and associated notices available in each Arbitron *PPM Radio Market Report*. This latter source will reflect updates to the Special Station Activities guidelines in effect prior to report publication.

Examples contained in this handbook are not all-inclusive, are illustrative only, and should not be construed as the absolute limits of the scope of Arbitron's Special Station Activities guidelines or the determination Arbitron may make with regard to any particular event or set of circumstances.

Arbitron may request the return of its encoding equipment from, or decline to publish audience estimates for, any station engaging in an activity that, in Arbitron's opinion, may result in substantial Rating Distortion or Rating Bias.

### **Pre-Reviews**

Arbitron recommends a confidential Pre-Review of station promotional activities as the single most effective means of avoiding activities with Rating Distortion or Rating Bias potential.

## Rating Distortion

Arbitron may consider as Rating Distortion any station activity that Arbitron believes may result in:

- The participation of PPM panel participants unauthorized by Arbitron;
- The provision of false information to Arbitron;
- A station learning the identity of PPM panel participants;
- A station gaining access to, or influence over, any Arbitron PPM (except as explicitly authorized by Arbitron); or
- The use of any Arbitron PPM or encoded signal for any purpose other than those intended by Arbitron.

### Types of Rating Distortion

Rating Distortion activities may take several forms, including: Panelist Solicitation, Inauthentic Exposure to Encoded Media, Media Affiliation, and Unauthorized Use of Encoding Equipment.

#### Panelist Solicitation

Arbitron may consider as Rating Distortion any announcement, statement, or activity by a station *in any medium* that, in Arbitron's judgment, may prompt any PPM panelist to:

- Identify his or her participation in the panel;
- Surrender control of his or her meter to a person other than that intended by Arbitron; or
- Provide false demographic or household information to Arbitron.

Additionally, Arbitron may consider any attempt by a station to learn the identity of a PPM panelist as Rating Distortion—regardless of whether the attempt results in the disclosure of any Arbitron research participant. An example of such an activity would include:

- Questions by stations on social networking sites or loyal listener e-mailings asking listeners whether they have participated in radio ratings research; or
- Questions on social networking sites or loyal listener e-mailings asking listeners whether they would be willing to carry a pager-sized device as part of a radio ratings research project.

*A station that learns the identity of any current or future Arbitron PPM panelist should notify Arbitron immediately.*

#### Inauthentic Exposure to Encoded Media

Arbitron may consider as Rating Distortion any station activity that, in Arbitron's judgment, may affect a panelist's behavior so that the media exposures captured by the panelist's meter differ from the panelist's exposure to encoded media.

## Types of Rating Distortion *(continued)*

### Media-Affiliation

No employee of any of the following entities, or member of the employee's household, is eligible to participate in an Arbitron PPM panel:

- Radio station
- Television station
- Cable television station
- Broadcast network
- Cable television network
- Newspaper
- Magazine
- Advertising agency

Participation in a PPM panel by an employee of a radio station will be considered Rating Distortion by the station with which the person is affiliated.

*If a station employee discovers that a household member has participated, or has agreed to participate in a PPM panel, Arbitron should be notified immediately.*

### Unauthorized Use of Encoding Equipment

Arbitron may consider the unauthorized use of encoding equipment or the unauthorized use of encoded audio as Rating Distortion. Unauthorized use may include—but is not limited to:

- The use of Arbitron encoding equipment by any station (including a co-owned station) other than the station for which the equipment was authorized by Arbitron;
- Double Encoding of a station's audio signal; or
- The use of a single encoder to encode non-simulcast programming—for example, the encoding of a station's non-simulcast Internet stream with the code of the originating AM or FM station.

Arbitron reserves the right to take whatever measures are necessary, in Arbitron's opinion, to protect the integrity of Arbitron's PPM audience estimates and data.

## Rating Bias

Arbitron may consider as Rating Bias any announcement, statement, or activity by a station that may:

- Differentially prompt a particular station's listeners to participate as Arbitron PPM panelists (relative to other stations' listeners); or
- Differentially prompt PPM panelists who listen to a particular station to comply with Arbitron instructions (relative to panelists who listen to other stations).

Examples of activities with Rating Bias potential would include:

- Encouragement by, or on behalf of, a station to listeners to participate as Arbitron PPM panelists;
- Messages to panelists by, or on behalf of, a station to carry their meters with them or download their listening information to Arbitron; or
- Messages delivered by a radio station, *in any medium*, alerting listeners that Arbitron PPM ratings research is, or soon will be, in progress or emphasizing the importance of participation in PPM ratings research.

**Note:** References to success in Arbitron PPM ratings reports for *prior* report periods (subject to contractual agreement with Arbitron) are not treated as Rating Bias under these guidelines, provided that the references conform with all other elements of Arbitron's Rating Distortion and Rating Bias guidelines. References to a station's performance in prior reports in the context of appeals for support, or accompanied by discussion of Arbitron's PPM methodology, are not protected under these guidelines and may be treated by Arbitron as activities with Rating Bias potential.

### Types of Rating Bias

Activities with Rating Bias potential include those that may differentially sensitize one station's listeners to Arbitron's methodology, PPM recruitment process, or PPM equipment—relative to other stations' listeners. Such activities may differentially prompt a particular station's listeners to participate as PPM panelists (relative to other stations' listeners) or may differentially prompt panelists who listen to a particular station to comply with Arbitron's instructions (relative to panelists who listen to other stations).

#### Promotion of Participation as Panelists

Arbitron may consider as Rating Bias any activity, announcement, or statement, *in any medium*, by, or on behalf of, a station that, in Arbitron's judgment, may differentially prompt the station's listeners to participate as PPM panelists. Examples of such activities include:

- Comments to the station's listeners describing Arbitron's methodology or instruments;
- Announcements that PPM research is currently, or will soon be, in progress; or
- Discussions on-air, or on social networking sites to which listeners may be exposed, emphasizing the importance of participation in radio ratings research—regardless of whether the names "Arbitron" or "PPM" are used.

#### Encouragement to Comply With Arbitron's Instructions

Arbitron may consider as Rating Bias any activity, announcement, or statement, *in any medium*, by, or on behalf of, a station that in Arbitron's judgment may be perceived by panelists as a prompt to comply with Arbitron's instructions. Examples of such activities include:

- On-air discussions emphasizing that the station's success depends on PPM panelists carrying their meters; or
- Comments on a social networking site by station personnel reminding panelists to undock and carry their meters.

## Applicable Media

Arbitron's Rating Distortion and Rating Bias guidelines apply to activities and comments by stations and their staff members in any medium to which listeners are likely to be exposed—including newspapers, social networking sites, and other media that communicate via written words. Comments made by station personnel in social networking sites, for example, may be treated as Rating Distortion, if the comments are likely to prompt current PPM panelists to disclose their participation—regardless of whether the comments result in such a disclosure and regardless of whether the station personnel use pseudonyms.

## Rating Distortion/Rating Bias Violations

Station activities with Rating Distortion or Rating Bias potential may result in responses from Arbitron that include—but are not limited to:

- **Special Notices**—Arbitron may place a special notice in applicable reports noting station activities with Rating Distortion or Rating Bias potential.
- **Flags**—Audience estimates may be noted by a special symbol and special footnote in the PPM Analysis Tool<sup>SM</sup> and other Arbitron services.
- **"Below-the-Line" Listing**—Stations that have engaged in activities with Rating Distortion or Rating Bias potential may be listed out of alphabetical sequence, below a special distinguishing line, in the *PPM Radio Market Report* (Arbitron eBook<sup>SM</sup>).
- **Delistment**—Arbitron may decline to publish audience estimates or data in all Arbitron services for any station that, in Arbitron's judgment, has engaged in an activity with Rating Distortion or Rating Bias potential warranting delistment.

Arbitron reserves the right to note activities with Rating Bias and Rating Distortion potential by any other means deemed appropriate in Arbitron's judgment. Arbitron also reserves the right to utilize other forms of remedial action appropriate in Arbitron's judgment.

## Requests for an Inquiry

Requests from a station for Arbitron to conduct an inquiry into an activity by another station should be submitted to Arbitron in writing and accompanied by evidence, such as an air-check recording, web site screen shot, e-mail advertisement, or newspaper clipping. Requests will be accepted through the last day of the applicable report period.

The initiation of an inquiry is solely within the discretion of Arbitron. Arbitron will review activities conducted at any time (before, during, or after a report period) for compliance with the above guidelines if, in Arbitron's judgment, the activity has the potential to undermine the integrity or perceived integrity of Arbitron's audience estimates.

## Additional Information

- The same activity could be subject to citation for two or more consecutive reports, depending on the timing and severity of the activity.
- Activities noted for one station may also be cited for additional stations on which the specific programming segment was also broadcast.
- Rating Distortion and Rating Bias activities noted in Arbitron's reports may or may not have actually affected audience estimates. It is not possible to prove or disprove the effect of such activities, and Arbitron makes no attempt to do so. Activities with Rating Distortion or Rating Bias potential are nonetheless inherently detrimental to broadcasters, advertisers, and media researchers. That such activities may undermine confidence in audience estimates constitutes sufficient reason to notify report users of their occurrence.
- Arbitron reserves the right to use any available means to draw attention to any station activity that, in Arbitron's opinion, has the potential to undermine the credibility of the survey, even though the activity does not meet any of the specific criteria outlined above. Arbitron further reserves the right to take other appropriate action, depending upon the content, context, frequency, or repetition of the activity.
- These guidelines are an effort to maintain the credibility of listener estimates and the integrity of the survey process. We believe a spirit of professionalism and ethical conduct by radio broadcasters will lead to active compliance with these guidelines.

### Contact Information

Arbitron welcomes questions and comments on our PPM Rating Distortion and Rating Bias guidelines.

Requests for inquiries into documented station activities, requests for confidential Pre-Reviews of planned station promotions, or questions or comments about our guidelines, may be addressed to:

#### Dave Willinski

Chairman  
 Special Station Activities Committee  
 Arbitron Inc.  
 9705 Patuxent Woods Drive  
 Columbia, MD 21046-1572  
 Phone: (410) 312-8396  
 Fax: (410) 312-8626  
 E-mail: dave.willinski@arbitron.com

**PPM ratings are based on audience estimates and are the opinion of Arbitron and should not be relied on for precise accuracy or precise representativeness of a demographic or radio market.**

**24/7 PPM Support (866) 776-8300 • [www.arbitrontraining.com](http://www.arbitrontraining.com) • [www.arbitron.com](http://www.arbitron.com)**

Headquarters 9705 Patuxent Woods Drive Columbia, MD 21046 (410) 312-8000	Atlanta 9000 Central Parkway Suite 300 Atlanta, GA 30328 (770) 668-5400	Chicago 222 South Riverside Plaza Suite 630 Chicago, IL 60606 (312) 542-1900	Dallas 13355 Noel Road Suite 1120 Dallas, TX 75240 (972) 385-5388	Los Angeles 10877 Wilshire Boulevard Suite 1400 Los Angeles, CA 90024 (310) 824-6600	New York 142 West 57th Street New York, NY 10019 (212) 887-1300
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