



## Neurological Testing of A&E Advertising Effectiveness

Category  
Media

### Business Challenge

A&E Television Networks has been one of cable television's biggest success stories, growing in primetime for five straight years in the key demographics Adults 18–49 and Adults 25–54. In 2008, A&E climbed to its best-ever annual rankings in the ad-supported cable network universe—#6 in Adults 18–49 and #5 in Adults 25–54.

Ratings success and critical acclaim aside, A&E wanted to know something even more fundamental about their #1 hit show, *Intervention*, and its millions of fans; specifically, what effect did the strongly emotional content of the series have on viewers' perceptions of sponsors' spots within the show?

### NeuroFocus Approach

Research results from some of the world's leading neuroscience laboratories have shown that when the brain is asked to recall an experience, it actually alters the original reaction it first formed as it prepares the answer. So asking viewers to articulate how they felt and what they remembered about the show, and the commercials in it, produces answers that are fundamentally unreliable—because the brain changes the original data it recorded in the process of preparing its reply.

NeuroFocus directly measures consumers' brain responses at 2,000 times a second. These measurements provided unmatched insights into consumers' subconscious reactions to the TV advertisements within the emotionally-driven content of AETN's cable programming.

Our proprietary tools included:

- ↳ **High-resolution, high-density array of electroencephalography (EEG sensors)** directly measure brainwave responses to stimuli in milliseconds
- ↳ **Eye-tracking** identifies location of focus
- ↳ **Deep Subconscious Response** to stimuli reveal sunarticulated feelings

### Study Design

A&E Network and NeuroFocus designed a study that would uncover and distill findings about two fundamental issues:

- ↳ What are the levels of viewers' emotional engagement with *Intervention*, and what are the impacts of that engagement on the effectiveness of advertising within the show?
- ↳ How well does the program's content prime those commercials for effectiveness?

NeuroFocus neurologically assessed commercials within the categories of automotive, food, insurance, personal care, retail, and telecommunications. Also, the shows themselves were tested to determine viewers' brainwave and biometric reactions to the program content.

A&E and NeuroFocus elected to concentrate the research on viewers' emotional engagement with the program content and the commercials that ran within it. Given *Intervention's* powerful content, this NeuroMetric would have the most meaning and value to the network and its advertisers. It is especially relevant because neuroscience has shown that emotional engagement is an essential precursor to and can be predictive of purchase or viewing intent.

The study was expanded to include a popular and highly-rated primetime dramatic program on another network. The same commercials that aired in *Intervention* were inserted into the pods within that show, to enable a head-to-head comparison of viewers' subconscious responses to the content and the advertising within each program.

## Specific Findings

NeuroFocus' research provided the client with the following specific results. All scores are ranked on a scale from 0-10:

### Program Content:

- ↳ Overall Effectiveness: *Intervention* scored notably higher than the competitive drama. The *Intervention* score also remained at this consistently high level throughout, while the competitive drama declined in the second half
- ↳ Emotional Engagement: *Intervention* won handily in this category

### Advertising:

- ↳ Overall Effectiveness: Three of six commercials scored significantly higher in *Intervention* than in the competitive drama. The other three scored essentially the same in both programs.
- ↳ Emotional Engagement: *Intervention* scored highest in each of six advertising categories.

The advertising benefited from viewers' strong emotional connection.

Viewers were highly engaged by *Intervention* and this level of engagement was sustained throughout the program; ad placement in later segments of the show suffered no drop-off in overall effectiveness. *Intervention* also scored the same or higher in more individual NeuroMetric categories than the competitive drama.

In the specific critical category of emotional engagement, the priming effect of the programming content on the commercials became clear. The advertising benefited from viewers' strong emotional connection with and reaction to this powerful, compelling show.

## Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Because neurological testing probes the deep subconscious mind for this data, advertisers can rely on these findings with complete confidence. The results of this study provide scientific evidence that when a company decides to advertise in reality programming that contains the kind of powerful and gripping content that *Intervention* features, there is no automatic downside to that choice. Instead, there is an opportunity to engage viewers' subconscious minds in equally, and often even more powerful and gripping ways.



©Copyright 2011 NeuroFocus, Inc.  
All rights reserved

NeuroFocus and the NeuroFocus logo are  
registered trademarks of NeuroFocus, a  
wholly-owned subsidiary of Nielsen.

Other company, product and service names  
may be service marks of their respective  
owners.

1200 Fifth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710  
T 510.526.1616 www.neurofocus.com