

TRUST MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

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Reasons  
Why Buyers  
**Choose and Use**  
Audited Media

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Alliance for  
Audited Media

This year has been full of uncertainty and change for marketing and media professionals. As the pandemic drastically affected consumer behavior, marketers needed to rethink campaign strategies quickly and differently by market. Agencies shortened their media planning timelines from months to days and weeks. Publishers focused on how to best reach their audiences. And the pace of change for all businesses—advertisers, agencies and publishers alike—accelerated.

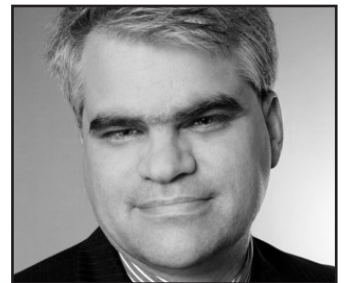
“The biggest thing is that you have to plan for the unknown and be nimble to move quickly,” explained **Bridgit Wallace**, vice president of media investment, Novus Media, Inc. “That’s really important to us and to our clients.”

In this time of accelerated change and uncertainty, the role of an audit remained constant: to give media buyers assurance and quality publishers an edge.

“An audit is table stakes,” said **Scott Kruse**, managing partner, director of print, GroupM. “The bulk of our money runs with audited publishers. Unless someone had a problem with the audit, it probably wouldn’t come up. But the bigger conversation about the value of audited brands is that they’re verified, fact-checked, quality brands. It’s always been a great story.”

## An audit is table stakes.

**Scott Kruse**, Managing Partner, Director of Print, GroupM



AAM recently interviewed top marketers and media buyers to better understand that story and the value they place on audited media today. The participating executives collectively represent more than 100 brands and nearly \$11 billion in print media spending. Through these conversations, we learned that there is a gap in communication about the value of audits between advertisers and publishing executives because audits are assumed. At a time when there is so much uncertainty, audits provide a level of fundamental control with third-party assurance and transparency.

“There is accountability with print,” said **Brenda White**, EVP/Group Director at Starcom. “We have to educate new team members on the benefits of print, and auditing is one of those.”

Audits build trust, and trust makes a difference for buyers and sellers alike. Buyers trust their decisions because audited media is accurate and provides a return on advertising investments. Audited publishers benefit from higher CPMs, prioritization in media plans and continued advertiser investment.

This report expands on each area to explain the broad value of audits. We’ll also share how buyers can use audits to make informed decisions and how quality publishers can leverage audits to stand out in a competitive media market.

# 1. Accuracy & ROI:

## Buyers Highly Value and Trust AAM-Audited Media

Advertisers and agencies consistently noted that AAM-audited media is valued higher when planning and buying print media. They trust the distribution is accurate and accounts for less waste, while unaudited media is subject to more scrutiny or omission from media plans.

“When we’re putting together a strategic publishing recommendation, we consider titles that are audited first,” explained White. “When a publication is audited, we have proof of circulation quality.”

Buyers also approach negotiations differently for unaudited publishers. One advertiser cited negotiating 20 to 50% lower CPMs to account for possible inflated circulation if the media is not audited. Another advertiser explained that they reduce the overall budget allocation by 20 to 60% for unaudited publishers.

“Unaudited publications are valued at a lower priority, if at all,” said **Steve Mueller**, CEO and president of NSA Media. “We pay less for unaudited publishers due to lack of transparency.”

Buyers value audited media because they are investing in distribution that is verified.

“We’ve done several studies and confirmed that newspapers are a key component to driving sales,” said a senior marketing manager. “It is very important that we use audited papers. Without them we have no confidence in our ad spend or our promotional reach.”

**When a publication is audited,  
we have proof of circulation  
quality.**

**Brenda White**, EVP/Group Director, Starcom



## 2. Defending the Spend:

### AAM Audits Support Continued Investment in Quality Publishers

Advertisers are under pressure to invest marketing dollars efficiently and effectively to drive sales. They're often challenged internally about investing in print when digital media may offer a more targeted audience at a lower investment. The AAM audit is critical in helping buyers defend this advertising channel within their organizations.

"Audits are key to what we do," explained a senior marketing manager. "We have a robust program with 26 million circulars, 1,500 publications and 80 versions every week. Our agency makes it possible, but only within the boundaries of our buying principles. Buying unaudited media is a big no-no; like buying a car without a warranty."

While audits are one of many factors that play into a buyer's decision to invest in a media property, they serve as a signal of accuracy, confidence and reliability.

An advertising director at a luxury brand explained: "The audit is as important as it ever was. Everything is under a microscope, and you need to know that you are delivering what you say you're delivering. We look for titles to be audited and take a much harder look at anything that's not."

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**Buying unaudited media is like  
buying a car without a warranty.**

Senior Marketing Manager, Major Retailer

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**Jeanne Finegan**, chief media officer at HF Media and vice president of media solutions at Prime Clerk, implements integrated communications campaigns for legal cases, such as informing consumers of their rights if they have an unsafe product. When she is called to testify concerning outreach efforts, she uses audits as a tool to defend her spend.

“We are accountable to courts, litigating parties, large brands and government,” she said. “Everybody is looking at our work. We need to be abundantly careful to not overstate our media reach. That’s why it’s important that we’re using audited sources. We need third-party verification. If someone says you didn’t do a good enough job reaching my constituents, we can say yes we did because it was audited.”

**We need third-party verification.**

**Jeanne Finegan**, Chief Media Officer, HF Media



Retailers are also accountable to the brands they sell and feature in their marketing materials. One retailer explained that they maintain a strong relationship with their brand partners because they have a shared understanding that they invest in audited media:

“Audits are not a big discussion point because they’re something we assume. If I said we were moving to unaudited media, I wouldn’t get past page one with my manufacturers.”

### 3. Opportunities & Optimization:

#### AAM-Audited Publishers Prioritized in Media Buys

Buyers concentrate on AAM-audited media because the third-party verified data is accurate. Several advertisers said they choose to partner with AAM-audited publishers first and have guidelines for their agencies that they only want to advertise in audited publications.

“We continually help our clients optimize their circular distribution through data-informed strategies,” said **Gwen Maass**, vice president of media services, Quad. “Advertisers demand transparency and verification of circulation, delivery and other data. So, when choosing publications for circular distribution, audited home delivery is preferred over unaudited newspapers. Then we layer in additional products from there—audited newsstand, audited nonpaid or TMC products. Unaudited newspapers are typically last because it is more difficult to track and measure delivery and receipt. Newspapers benefit from an organization like AAM for this reason.”

Wallace explained that when Novus is tasked with researching options to reach certain geographies, she looks for a quality option first.

“This is where AAM comes in,” Wallace said. “Is this quality circulation? Is this trusted circulation? Do I know this is getting inside the home? I go through our checks and balances and then see if it aligns with our performance metrics to determine if it meets the selection criteria to make the buy.”

**When choosing publications for circulation distribution, audited home delivery is preferred over unaudited newspapers.**

**Gwen Maass**, VP, Media Services, Quad



Finegan also carefully evaluates and prioritizes audited sources so she can confidently answer questions about how many people her campaigns reach.

"I did the outreach for PG&E's Chapter 11 as well as Purdue Pharma's Chapter 11, and as part of the massive declaration, we included intricate details for all the planning and research," she said. "We included a comprehensive list of all the sources and research we relied upon, active links to that research and explanation as to why that is the best research to formulate our opinions."

**AAM-audited vendors are first in the consideration set because their statistics are available to us electronically.**

**Steve Mueller**, CEO & President, NSA Media



While audits help publishers earn new advertising investments, many buyers explained that going unaudited gives them a reason to test other media or do a dark market test.

"Vendor selection and transparency are paramount to our client's campaigns," said Mueller. "AAM-audited vendors are first in the consideration set because their statistics are available to us electronically. We do not search for unaudited publications. We will look to social and digital instead."

## 4. Data Access:

### AAM Data Helps Buyers Do Their Jobs Efficiently

Many agencies explained that they support audits because AAM provides data in a format that helps them plan and buy media and is often the starting point when buyers are looking to research potential publishing partners. AAM's Media Intelligence Center saves media buyers from contacting thousands of news media companies and configuring data into a common format.

**Matt Spahn**, founder and CEO of planitretail, explained that audits are important when questioning the reliability of the numbers, but access to the data is also helpful.

"AAM makes the data accessible and user friendly as opposed to us going to thousands of newspapers to get the data, work with the data and format the data, which also creates unnecessary guesswork and challenges. AAM does a lot of the heavy lifting there."

Many media buying agencies have data feeds from AAM, which allows data to flow directly into their system. Wallace explained how Novus uses AAM data:

"If there are questions or we're looking for something specific, we'll go to the Media Intelligence Center to dig deeper. It becomes a first stop for knowledge and then we continue on our path, whether that's asking the publisher for clarification or validating through our own system."

Mueller agreed that AAM's data distribution is helpful to their media planning and buying process.

"AAM serves as a central authority for media buyers to access audience and circulation figures to make investment decisions," he said. "Lack of participation impacts publishers' ability to obtain and maintain advertising dollars."

**AAM makes the data accessible and user friendly as opposed to us going to thousands of newspapers to get the data, work with the data and format the data.**



**Matt Spahn**, Founder and CEO, planitretail



## 5. Assurance:

### AAM Helps Build Trust Between Advertisers, Agencies and Publishers

For marketers, agencies and publishers, building trust is paramount to help the industry function efficiently. Agencies who communicate their priority in audited publications trust that their clients' media investments are benefitting legitimate publishers with verified distribution claims.

"The value of the audit and the confidence it gives buyers in investing in the product is strong and necessary," Spahn said. "It allows us to give the advertiser a higher level of comfort into what's invested relative to where the quantities are going. Trust goes a long way for advertisers to know that this is a worthwhile investment."

Here are some tips for buyers and publishers to maximize and activate the value of the AAM audit.

#### For Buyers

- **Understand the differences between audited and unaudited media**, including that audited media has distribution verified by a third party to give you the most accurate information. Audited media is also important to the accuracy of media mix models, as unaudited media may result in false negatives or positives.
- **Share with publishers why audits are important to you**—whether that is to make the most accurate plans, save time or have confidence in your decisions.
- **Communicate with clients and colleagues** that you are making sound decisions by investing in audited media.
- **Get access to AAM's database.** All AAM clients received unlimited access to the Media Intelligence Center, which houses AAM information for nearly 2,000 publishers.

#### For Publishers

- **Leverage the differences between audited and unaudited media**, focusing on your accurate distribution, verified by a third party.
- **Communicate internally about your audit.** Different departments may be interested in knowing more about what the audit means for your organization.
- **Share with buyers why you are an audited publisher**—whether that's because your organization is committed to quality, you are trying to reach buyers, or you believe in following industry best practices and internal processes.
- **Get access to AAM's Media Intelligence Center** to see how buyers view your information, optimize your AAM profile and analyze competitors.



The **Alliance for Audited Media** powers transparency and collaboration between North America's leading media professionals. AAM is the industry's recognized leader in cross-media verification with unparalleled expertise across all brand platforms including web, mobile, email and print. More than 4,000 publishers, advertisers, agencies and technology vendors depend on AAM's data-driven insights, technology certification audits and information services to transact with trust.

For more information on how to maximize media audits for your business, visit [auditedmedia.com](https://auditedmedia.com).