

# The state of the attention economy and its impact on radio media planning

 By [Deborah Schepers](#)

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In economics, a scarce resource is one with an available quantity that is less than its desired use. While we tend to think of commodities such as oil and gold, when we think about scarce resources, the human capacity for attention is limited and is largely being exceeded today.



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A wealth of information has created a poverty of attention, and the attention economy has peaked in the digital age. This means that people are no longer able to give more attention to things – they simply have no more hours in the day. ‘Revenge bedtime procrastination’ is a term referring to overworked people who reclaim time for themselves from the hours in which they should be asleep. They’re sacrificing sleep for some leisure time, pushing out their bedtimes because they feel robbed of the opportunity to engage in activities that they want to engage in during the day.

But everyone needs to sleep, which means that people are now having to prioritize between the things seeking their attention. Many of the choices we make around what to give our attention to are not our best ones. While nobody wakes up planning to spend two hours of their day on Instagram and Twitter, this is often what happens. It happens because social media platforms are engineered to do exactly this, with sophisticated algorithms offering endless distraction and the lure of effortless scrolling onto the next thing. Often while on social media we should be doing other things which are more necessary, thus putting more pressure on our time.

Social media adds to the influx of digital information and always-on communication vying for our mental focus, and life in the developed work has become busier and busier. Alarmingly, not only are we battling to choose what to concentrate on, but we’re battling to concentrate for very long – the average human attention span has decreased from 15-18 seconds in

2002, to 3-8 seconds in 2015, according to [Time Magazine](#).

### **Paying attention has a different meaning**

While in the past, brute force branding approaches that invaded attention may have worked due to the lack of other available content, today's consumers are unconsciously screening out so many things that irrelevant messaging is often not even noticed as an irritation factor. Just capturing someone's attention and holding it for more than 3 seconds is the new battle frontier for advertisers. Time is money, more than it's even been, and the phrase 'paying attention' is now a literalization.

While ad agencies have increasingly more data on their target markets, people are better and better at ignoring the messaging. Attention is one of the most valuable resources of the digital age and the job of the media planner is getting progressively more difficult every day.

To get someone to notice and be moved by your message, you need to be as close as possible to the content that they choose to give their attention to. Ideally, you need to be right on top of it - integrated into it. In the radio sector, this shifts the focus of the planner from just placing generic ads in breaks to creating a connection that increases the impact of the ads heard later.

Respondents to radio research often talk about the station they listen to as being a 'friend' or a 'companion'. This personification of a media channel is fascinating, and suggests a great deal of opportunity for leveraging influence rather than just for placing advertising. Radio is also by nature a fluid combination of content types: presenters deliver a live commentary on our days as they unfold in our various cities; callers add their stories and views, and we listen to the soundtrack to our lives.

Memes are unpacked along with news and current affairs, and new story arcs are created every few hours – some in the form of jokes between presenters, and some more intense as different situations and streams of conversation develop. Radio is both a reflection and a creator of culture. Audiences choose to give their attention to it because it's relevant to them, unlike many of the ads they screen out. Radio content helps people understand their worlds, and makes them feel part of something.

### **Creating messages that are relevant**

The opportunity for advertisers now is to work with radio stations to integrate their messaging into the content and stories that are getting this attention. A medium like TV, while powerful, doesn't allow for this kind of creativity, with audience relationships often being with the separate shows rather than with the channel. The way in which content is created on the go in radio also means that brand messaging can be woven into the daily conversations without extensive planning or heavy production costs.

Radio is not a quick, cheap and nasty reach medium. But, radio is the best medium for creating messaging that is relevant

to the lives of audiences and connects your brand to them. The radio media planner's approach needs to evolve from just placing ads at a certain cost per thousand, to truly leveraging the power of the medium when it comes to capturing and holding listener attention for hours every day.

## ABOUT DEBORAH SCHEPERS

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