In January 1999, RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research) Ltd, jointly owned by the BBC and commercial radio, introduced its new audience research system, RAJAR 99. It is described as "future proof" in its capacity to meet the industry's demands for the most accurate possible measurement of radio listening habits in the UK. The first set of quarterly figures was reported in June.

RAJAR appointed market research company Ipsos-RSL to handle what is the biggest media research project in the world outside the US and one of Europe's largest and most complex ongoing audience measurement surveys. The contract for RAJAR covers UK national, regional and local radio listening patterns across almost 250 BBC and commercial stations. Ipsos-RSL uses ROCC Computers' document scanning and recognition technology to process some 150,000 survey booklets, each over 20 pages long, completed annually by UK listeners.

...biggest media research project outside the US

RAJAR 99 provided listeners with easier to use, highly personalised booklets. These in turn ensure better quality data, especially with the new control of only one respondent per household completing the booklets at any one time. For the first time, RAJAR has been able to introduce rolling, quarterly reporting of data for all stations.

Previously quarterly figures were available only for the large stations (4 million plus listeners); medium to small (over 300,000 listeners) were reported bi-annually and small stations (under 300,000) only once per year. Reports will now be far more up-to-date and accurate for all participants.

The information collected is seen as vital to both BBC and commercial stations, providing the only accurate data on audience profiles, station preferences, peak listening times etc. This enables them to be more responsive to listeners, to plan programmes and - for the commercial stations - to support airtime sales and ultimately financial success.

John Stockley is divisional director responsible for the RAJAR audience measurement contract, worth some £11 million to Ipsos-RSL over a four-year period when it was renewed from January 1999. "We believe that the RAJAR study is second only to UK TV media audience measurement in value - but that task is handled electronically, without need for direct listener input."

"Ipsos-RSL originally gained the first RAJAR contract in 1992, but the task was always a growing, changing one and RAJAR put out a new specification in March 1998. We won the contract against four other companies. We had already demonstrated how flexible we could be and how efficient and well proven our systems were. We invested some £180,000 in the ROCC solution to ensure that we could continue to meet the challenges of fulfilling the new RAJAR 99 contract."

...no key data entry is involved

It's a complex organisational and administrative task to print, place, collect and process the listening booklets used for the task. Each week, Ipsos-RSL interviewers place some 250 new assignments -

RAJAR - Easier Listening with ROCC

Stockley: "...the scanning and recognition system has proved more than capable of meeting the challenges of the RAJAR task"

Ipsos-RSL
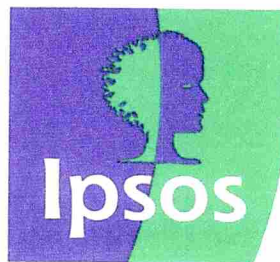
Autumn/Winter 1999

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Listening...

each one has to place around 18 A4 folded to A5-size booklets- totalling 4500 booklets a week for respondents to complete. The 250 stations, with their overlapping signals, create more than 500 unique 'segments' which must be surveyed throughout the year.

A respondent listening to a programme. He will record all listening for the whole week, night and day, in 15-minute blocks. Boxes are marked against radio stations in the booklets which are tailored for every region.

People are chosen using sampling procedures to ensure specific address areas are covered and the respondents are representative of the population, using information gained from census data and other major surveys conducted by Ipsos-RSL. Candidates are interviewed to gain additional background and media watching/listening data and advised how to fill in the booklets, which ask them to record all listening to any radio for the whole week, night and day, in fifteen-minute blocks. They mark boxes against radio stations in the booklets which are tailored for every region. Each booklet is customised using labels for stations which are available and includes pages for further information or particular comments on individual radio stations or programmes.

With a response rate of over 85 per cent, this means some 3500 booklets being returned weekly for processing. Annually this equates to over three million pages of data.

Every booklet is manually checked for obvious errors and, after removal of the spine, is then scanned via the ROCC system; no key data entry is involved. Ipsos-RSL uses two scanners, one interpreter and five PCs, all linked to a central server and used by up to eight people, undertaking editing, supervising the system and monitoring form scanning.

...ROCC system was more flexible than our previous solution

According to John Stockley: "We chose the ROCC system because it was more flexible than our previous solution, it scans forms much more quickly so throughput is greatly increased, and because of experiences using ROCC within other areas of our business. The ability to change formats quickly and easily to meet the demands of the task, or to suit particular research projects, has been key to the system's success. Changes that would previously have taken several weeks to

Each booklet is manually checked for obvious errors, the spine is removed and the booklet is scanned via the ROCC system.

implement are now out in the field within a couple of weeks, enabling us to be more responsive to our client, RAJAR.

...ROCC invested considerable time and effort

"ROCC personnel invested considerable time and effort in programming our system to meet our complex needs back at the beginning of the project and have continued to provide excellent technical support as we continue development. We awarded the contract in June 1998, but our priority was to prepare the booklet and all the associated material.

"In September we began working on the scanning system together and most of the work was done by December. The first of the new booklets were placed early in January, came back mid-January and we allowed just a week after that first run to check and amend the system. ROCC met all our targets."

All BBC stations, the national commercial stations Atlantic 252, Classic FM, Talk Radio and Virgin, and almost every local commercial station is covered by RAJAR. Labels with station names are produced to match each area and every listener interviewed selects those which give the stations they are likely to listen to or hear. One might listen to a couple of stations regularly only; another might come across ten or more during the course of a week's exposure to radio. Each response is unique, ensuring a highly complex analysis task for the software, which identifies every station using two digital codes.

RAJAR performance data forms part of each BBC station's performance review and is vital to the monitoring of BBC services. For the commercial stations, data on audience listening patterns is very important in programme planning and selling air-time. The stations are proud of their ratings and broadcast their successes! They - and the public - have come to rely on RAJAR to provide quality, independent research data

...able to cope with far more data than ever before

For Ipsos-RSL, John Stockley sees a number of benefits: "The survey has grown dramatically over five years and we are now able to cope with far more data than ever before, but within the same original time scales for the quarterly issue of results. Scanning is an extremely cost-effective technique - if we had to carry out this work using conventional data entry methods, it would not only be extremely difficult and manpower-intensive to do, but it would probably cost us over £100,00 a year more. The system is flexible, so we can respond quickly to vary questionnaire design and will be regularly able to demonstrate responsiveness to our client. The speed of processing is extremely fast using these scanners and the ROCC software; we are talking very large volumes and the system is put under intense pressure virtually all the time. Its robustness is well proven."

...the speed of processing is extremely fast

For the future, John Stockley sees a growing dem-and for the most user-friendly aspects of the ROCC software. "We are already able to process hand-written comments from listeners and this will undoubt-edly be extended as radio companies see the benefits of comments on individual programmes, for example. We are also making the booklets increas-ingly attractive and easy to use for both interviewers and listeners, with options such as writing actual ages rather than having to tick an option box, for example."

He concludes: "While electronic measurement may become a reality at some time, the ROCC document scanning and recognition system has proved more than capable of meeting the challenges of the RAJAR task. We have been able to demonstrate that we can move forward with RAJAR and look forward to working with ROCC to do so well into the future."

Stockley: "...scanning is an extremely cost-effective technique"
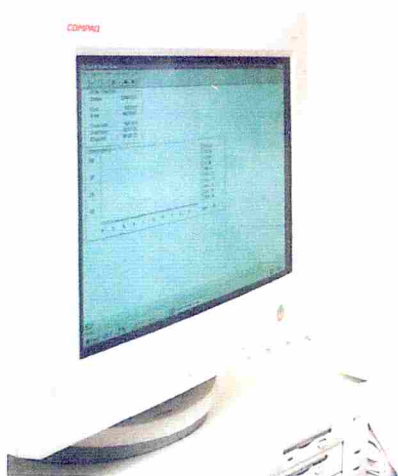
Two scanners are used, plus one interpreter and five PCs, all linked to a central server and used by up to eight people, undertaking editing, supervising the system and monitoring form scanning.