

# **NIELSEN AUDIO**

# **RATING DISTORTION HANDBOOK**

2019-2020 EDITION

## INTRODUCTION

'Rating Distortion' is the term we use to describe any broadcaster activity or statement that has the potential to adversely affect Nielsen Audio's audience estimates or subvert the audience research process.

This *Nielsen Audio Rating Distortion Handbook* provides an overview of our rating distortion policy. We developed and refined the policy over time in cooperation with radio broadcasters, advertisers, and other industry groups.

While this handbook describes our policy and provides examples, it does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of all activities with rating distortion potential. Radio's ever-changing nature precludes the listing of all possible activities to be avoided.

For radio to remain a vibrant medium, it is essential that buyers and sellers continue to have confidence in Nielsen data. The goal of our rating distortion policy is to help preserve the integrity of our data and the market's confidence in the data.

## PERSONS TO WHOM THE POLICY APPLIES

The policy described in this handbook applies to **all radio station personnel**, including any radio station employee, manager, board member, intern, volunteer, contractor, consultant, and/or any other person associated with the station or its corporate parent, **at all times**. Throughout this handbook we use different nouns such as 'broadcaster,' 'staff,' 'station' or 'outlet' to indicate any and/or all of these individuals. A specific guideline may also apply to additional people; we list those persons, as applicable.

## TYPES OF RATING DISTORTION ACTIVITIES

### MEDIA AFFILIATION

Media-affiliated persons are not eligible to participate in any PPM Panel, Diary survey, or other Nielsen research Panel.

We use the term 'media-affiliated' as an umbrella term to indicate any person employed by, retained by, contracting for, interning, or volunteering at a radio station, satellite radio broadcaster, broadcast television station or network, cable television station or network, or advertising agency.

Anybody living in a media-affiliated person's household is also ineligible to participate.

People that do not reside in the media-affiliated person's household, but that have a personal or business relationship with the media-affiliated person are also ineligible to participate.

### **The participation of media-affiliated persons in a PPM Panel or Diary survey is rating distortion.**

**IMPORTANT:** If a media outlet discovers that a media-affiliated person is participating, has participated, or has agreed to participate in a PPM Panel or Diary survey, a representative for the outlet should contact us immediately by dialing 667-786-4550.

## PANELIST/SURVEY RESPONDENT SOLICITATION

It is critical that the identities of panelists and survey respondents remain secret. We consider rating distortion to include any media-affiliated person's activity or announcement that may prompt a panelist or survey respondent to:

- Disclose his or her identity / confirm participation in the Panel/survey;
- Surrender control of his or her meter or diary to a person other than that intended by Nielsen;
- Provide false demographic or household information to Nielsen; or
- Otherwise learn any Panelist / survey respondents identity.

Solicitation announcements include messages transmitted on-air, in other media (websites, social media, audio, video, text, print, etc.), or in private conversations.

Panelist or survey respondent solicitation can also occur on social media platforms. Solicitation activities can occur on social media regardless of whether the activity actually resulted in a panelist or respondent disclosing their participation, whether or not the media-affiliated person used a pseudonym on the social media platform, or if the solicitation occurred when using a 'business' or 'personal' account.

**Any attempt by a media-affiliated person to learn the identity of a Panelist and/or to secure control of a Panelist meter is rating distortion.**

**Any attempt by a media-affiliated person to learn the identity of a survey respondent and/or to secure control of a respondent's diary is rating distortion.**

If a media outlet learns the identity of anyone who is currently in the Panel or survey, who is in the recruitment process, or who has participated in a Panel/survey, a representative for the outlet must contact us immediately by dialing 667-786-4550.

## PROVISION OF FALSE STATION INFORMATION

An essential data input for our services is the station information that radio broadcasters provide to us. We use this information for station crediting, station encoding, and reporting of the audience estimates.

Generally, a station's Manager or Program Director (or other pre-authorized person) is responsible for providing us with this information. That individual provides the information via the online station information tool (eSIP), via email, or via telephone. Upon the provision of the station information, that person certifies that all of the information he or she provided is accurate.

**The provision of false station information to Nielsen may constitute rating distortion.**

## PPM CODE POLICY / UNAUTHORIZED USE OF PPM ENCODER

Each station's PPM codes are unique. The unique nature of PPM codes helps assure we assign listening credit to the appropriate station.

Our PPM Code Policy requires that a station transmit the appropriate PPM code. During the equipment configuration process, we program a station's unique PPM codes into its encoders. In order to comply with the PPM Code Policy, the station should install and operate the equipment according to our instructions. By entering an encoding agreement with Nielsen, the outlet agrees to a series of terms and requirements that include the authorized uses of PPM encoders and PPM codes.

Any misuse of encoding equipment has the potential to be rating distortion. Examples of misuse of encoding equipment include:

- Transmitting a PPM code other than the station's proper code;
- Providing a PPM-encoded signal to another station for re-transmission;
- Re-transmitting another station's PPM-encoded signal; or
- Using the encoding equipment in a manner other than that which was intended.

Should we determine that a station has misused the encoding equipment, we will take action as needed in our judgement.

**The misuse of PPM encoding equipment and in-station PPM encoding monitors may constitute rating distortion.**

### PROMPTING INAUTHENTIC EXPOSURE TO ENCODED MEDIA

We instruct panelists to keep their meters with them throughout the day. Any media outlet statement or activity that, in our judgement, may prompt or affect panelist behavior so that the media exposures captured by a panelist's meter differs from the media to which the panelist was actually exposed is rating distortion.

**Any action that results in the inauthentic exposure to encoded media is rating distortion.**

### DIARY SOLICITATION

There are two primary modes of Diary solicitation. The first is an attempt to get a Diarykeeper to surrender control of his or her Diary. The second is an attempt to prompt a Diarykeeper to record his or listening in a manner that differs from actual listening. Examples of Diary solicitation include (but are not limited to):

- An offer to "buy" Nielsen diaries;
- Any action that causes a Diarykeeper to report 'more' listening to the station, a specific amount of listening or the station, or to misreport listening in the diary;
- Any action that causes a Diarykeeper to *not* list other specific stations in the diary;
- Any action that prompts a Diarykeeper to report false demographic / household information to us;
- Any action that seeks to garner "support" or "help" the ratings by reporting more listening;
- Contest rules that award larger prizes (or a greater opportunity to win) based on larger amounts of listening claimed or written down;
- On-air discussions or communication via other media that emphasize the importance of the act of diary-keeping or recording extensive listening in diaries;
- Contests or promotions that may cause a Diarykeeper to mistake the diary for a contest entry form or asking listeners to submit their diaries as contest entry forms or using the diary as "proof" of the length of listening;
- Promotions which suggest that specific listening took place, even if listeners are not instructed to report that listening (for example, "WAAA – the station you listened to all day at work today").

**Diary solicitation is rating distortion.**

## MESSAGES ABOUT THE PANEL OR SURVEY (RATING BIAS)

Station staff should avoid discussing Nielsen’s methodology, the survey process, the survey instruments, or cooperation with our instructions on-air or in any other medium; such messages have the potential to sensitize a survey participant to the research process (and thus result in that individual altering their behavior or listening). We may consider such messages to be rating distortion.

### Examples of such comments in PPM markets include:

- Encouragement of a station to listeners to participate as Nielsen PPM panelists;
- Any communication to panelists to carry their meters with them or download their listening information to Nielsen;
- Any communication delivered by a radio station, *in any medium*, alerting listeners that Nielsen PPM ratings research is, or soon will be, in progress or emphasizing the importance of participation in PPM ratings research;
- Comments to the station’s listeners describing Nielsen methodology or instruments;
- Announcements that Nielsen Audio research is currently, or will soon be, in progress;
- Discussions on-air or in social media that emphasize the importance of participation in radio ratings research—regardless of whether the names “Nielsen” or “PPM” are used; or
- On-air discussions emphasizing that the station’s success depends on PPM panelists carrying their meters.

### Examples of such comments in Diary markets include:

- Any communication that indicates a survey is currently underway or will soon be underway;
- Any communication specifically about the survey or the survey instrument;
- Any communication urging a respondent to report all of your radio listening ‘as completely and accurately as possible’;
- Direct messages to Diarykeepers such as -- “If you’re keeping a rating diary, this is WAAA.”
- Direct-mail pieces or print ads that resemble a Nielsen diary; or
- Promotions for contests in which prizes are reminiscent of Nielsen’s name, materials, or methodology.

In Diary markets, station staff should also refrain from making indirect appeals to Diarykeepers. In this context, an ‘indirect appeal’ is a message that may not make a specific reference to Nielsen, the survey, or the Diary, but may nonetheless affect the way a Diarykeeper would record listening to the station. Examples of such comments may include:

- “If you’re keeping track of your listening, this is WAAA, your number one station for classic rock.”
- “If anyone asks you what station you listen to most, tell ‘em WAAA, Hot Country.”
- “Dear Diary: Listened to All News WAAA.”
- “You have to tell everyone who asks that you listen to this station, or we’ll never be number one.”
- “And remember, when anyone asks you your favorite station, write down WAAA.”
- “If you get a radio survey in the mail, don’t throw it out – fill it out!”; or
- “We won’t be talking about this on the air, but as a member of WAAA’s Loyal Listener Club, it’s important that you participate in any radio survey that you can.”

### Any communication about the Panel or Survey may constitute rating distortion.

Note: References to success in Nielsen ratings in prior reports are acceptable so long as the references conform to the terms of the client’s Nielsen data license agreement and with all other elements of our rating distortion policy. Conversely, references to a station’s performance in prior reports in the context of appeals for support, or accompanied by discussion of Nielsen methodology, may be considered as activities with rating distortion potential.

## APPLICABLE MEDIA

The rating distortion policy described in this handbook applies to all media to which radio listeners may be exposed, including on-air radio broadcasts, streaming media, social media, text messaging, on-demand media, television broadcasts, print publications, any other multimedia platform, and any other medium that communicates via written or spoken words.

## VIOLATIONS

Should we determine that an outlet has engaged in rating distortion activities, we will take action as warranted in our judgement. Examples of the actions we may take include (but are not limited to):

- **Disclosure of the activity to the marketplace** —we will disclose the rating distortion activity in a product notice to all clients, in a Special Notice in applicable reports and data sets, in personalized communications with select clients, a statement to the press, or any combination of these.
- **Audience Estimates Flagging** — we will flag the station's audience estimates with a distinguishing mark in our services and data sets including TAPSCAN, the PPM Analysis Tool<sup>SM</sup>, and services provided by our data partners. Flagged estimates will be complemented by an illustrative footnote in applicable reports.
- **Reissue of Data** -- Having determined a serious violation of the rating distortion policy has occurred, we may elect to correct any potential effect of the activity and publish revised data.
- **Remove the station from all reports and datasets (i.e. 'delistment')** — we may also elect to remove the station from certain reports and datasets. In instances where we delist a station, we may also elect to publish related disclosures to the marketplace.

We reserve the right to take action for one or more consecutive reports, depending upon the timing, duration, and severity of the activities that violated the guidelines.

In the rare instance that another radio station retransmitted messages for which a station was determined to be in violation of the guidelines, we reserve the right to take action against the retransmitting station.

## REQUESTS FOR AN INQUIRY

A station may inquire if another station's activities violate our rating distortion policy. To start such an inquiry, the station should contact us in writing. That communication should be accompanied by evidence of the activity in question such as an on-air recording, social media posting, email advertisement, etc.

The initiation of an inquiry is solely within our discretion. We will review activities conducted before, during, or after a report period for compliance with the above guidelines if, in our judgement, the activity has the potential to violate the guidelines.

## PRE-REVIEWS

We recommend a confidential Pre-Review of promotional activities as an effective means of avoiding activities with Rating Distortion potential. If you would like us to review promotional materials to determine if they conform with these guidelines, please contact us by dialing 667-786-4550.

## IF A PANELIST OR DIARYKEEPER CONTACTS YOUR STATION

We instruct all respondents to keep their participation in the Panel or survey confidential. Nevertheless, it is possible that a respondent may reach out to your station or a staff member. In order to avoid Rating Distortion activities, we recommend the following:

- If a Panelist or Diarykeeper calls in to an on-air program and identifies her or himself as a Nielsen respondent, the host should not discuss Nielsen, the Panel, PPM, the survey, or the Diary on the air or in private with the individual.
- If the Panelist or Diarykeeper reaches out to the station with the intent of general conversation about the station or Nielsen, the station should instruct the respondent to contact Nielsen directly.
- If the Panelist or Diarykeeper indicates the desire to surrender control of his or her meter or Diary, the station should contact us immediately by dialing 667-786-4550.

Please let us know right away if any of these scenarios have occurred.

**RESERVATION OF RIGHTS**

We reserve the right to prospectively or reactively change, modify, waive, or suspend any aspect of the methodology, policies, or procedures described herein and/or implement a new policy or procedures at any time as research considerations or business conditions warrant.

**CONTACT**

To report any Rating Distortion concerns, to request an inquiry into documented station activities, request a confidential Pre-Review of planned station promotions, or if you have any other questions about the policy, contact:

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