

Crikey's three-step guide to spinning your readership figures

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Want to use EMMA figures to beat up your competitors and reassure your readers? *Crikey* has your three-step guide.

All's well in newspaper land -- if you read the reporting in the newspapers, that is.

Yesterday the latest Enhanced Media Metrics Australia figures were released, which measure total masthead readership and were developed over a year ago as an alternative to the Roy Morgan figures that publishers criticised for underestimating their readership. And while readership went up for many of Australia's newspapers under the new methodology, that's not useful in beating up your competitors. That requires, well, a more selective approach. Inspired by the spin in *The Daily Telegraph's* report, *Crikey* has your three-step guide.

Avoid talk of aggregates

If you're coming second in your market, avoid mentioning that at all costs. *The Daily Telegraph* trails *The Sydney Morning Herald* by a million total readers, which is why on Monday, its report talked all about growth instead.

"*The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* recorded extensive growth in total audience during the mid-year months, building a formidable base of close to 4.5 million readers.

"In the three-month period to July the number of readers across the mastheads' print, online, tablet and mobile platforms surged by 4.4 per cent, with 186,000 newcomers added -- the biggest numerical growth recorded by a major newspaper nationwide."

Rounding is your friend

Notice the "close to 4.5 million readers"? The figure was actually 4.412 million, which means the *SMH's* description of the *Tele's* readership at 4.4 million was a good deal closer to the money.

Apples and oranges

But perhaps the best way to throw mud at your competitors (if your name is News Corp) is to go on about print readership at Fairfax.

"Figures for major Fairfax publications remain painted in red. *The Sydney Morning Herald's* weekday print editions lost 21,000 readers in the three months, a drop of 2.7 per cent," the *Tele's* report concluded.

This is true. And while Fairfax makes more money out of a print reader than one who reads online, the worrying (though partly intentional) decline in its print sales is worth pointing out. Fairfax's own report was silent on the matter. But on the *Tele's* part, it hardly seems fair to mention nothing about the *SMH* but its print readership when the start of the article compared the *Daily Telegraph's* total readership across all platforms. And on that metric, the *SMH* was up by 10,000 viewers (though its [own report](#) played things conservatively and said readership was "steady").

Bonus tip: make up your own metric

Mind you, *Crikey* advises readers take any EMMA figures with a pinch of salt. The metric is supported by industry body The Newspaper Works, and, [as Mumbrella revealed last month](#), relies on a troubling assumption to come to its results. Print publications are assumed to be read by several people, but over the past year, the number of shares for many publications has ballooned. A year ago, for example, a single print issue of *Zoo* was assumed to be read by nine people. Now that figure is 15, which acts to boost *Zoo's* readership. It's not clear why the numbers have changed as they have. The Newspaper Works [released a response](#) to *Mumbrella's* allegations, but didn't address the central concern about the rising number of people assumed to have read a single copy of a publication. *Mumbrella* doesn't cover the month-to-month EMMA figures. "Until someone can prove these aren't just numbers plucked from the air -- we won't," said editor Alex Hayes.