

## It All Began Ninety Years Ago<sup>1</sup>

The history of market and media research of the Curtis Publishing Company from 1911 to 1947

As Santayana has said, those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it. This is not only true regarding national and international history but also of all sciences.

In 1950 I was invited by the US Government to participate in their Exchange Program: together with three other German market researchers we were to attend a Summer Seminar at the University of Michigan. Afterwards we traveled to the main centers in the Eastern parts of the US plus Chicago where they visited around 70 major research organizations at universities, in companies producing goods, services, and media; and research organizations. Among them was, as a matter of course, the **Curtis Company** in Philadelphia.

There, we were kindly received by their research director, Donald M. Hobart, and his senior associates, who generously informed us about their research activities. Among the many reprints of important papers he presented me with three brochures containing:

»Digests of Principal Research  
Department Studies«

covering the periods 1911 to 1925, 1926 to 1940, and 1941 to 1947.

It is very likely that either not one of these brochures exist any more, or a few may be buried in archives.

This is a great pity, because a significant part of the history of market research is missing. One cannot really understand the development of market and readership research if one doesn't know what a pioneering publishing company wanted to know very early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and what pioneering Curtis researchers found out in their research projects.

- Quite often "The Consumer is King!" is being declared in popular papers and learned journals. Who knows these days that this famous slogan was first formulated in 1912 in a Curtis report on "Retailing and Jobbing" ?
- Time and again one reads in the papers that women have their own ideas regarding cars, their technical characteristics and their appearance. Well, who would guess that as early as 1916 Curtis researchers discovered the growing

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<sup>1</sup> Draft of April 2001 – used in a letter directed to the Curtis Publ. Co. in order to get the permission to produce these reprints – unfortunately never receiving a positive response.

influence of women on the purchase of automobiles and what they want ? See report on "Influence of Women on the Sale of Automobiles."

- In 1925 Curtis did a large scale study of "Radio", at a point in time when this "wonder industry", as they called it, was about to develop remarkably. Summary: "The radio market is permanent. When broadcasting was launched, something was given the public which cannot be taken away".

Since his company's research department has been established by Mr. Curtis in 1911, we had the idea that it might be worthwhile to produce a few dozen photo copies of these 460 pages, have them bound in a nice & sturdy cover and distribute them at the end of the year 2001 for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We would consider distribution to (a) relevant researchers and research organizations in the USA, Germany, and a few in other European countries, (b) to a number of important clients of ours. A copy would cost us something in the neighborhood of Euro 25 plus mailing. We would gladly spend this as a contribution to market research history and knowledge, - with a little bit of PR on the side.

I would regard this to be a heartfelt "Thanks" to the USA and to American researchers who have provided me with an education which was the foundation of a successful professional career.