

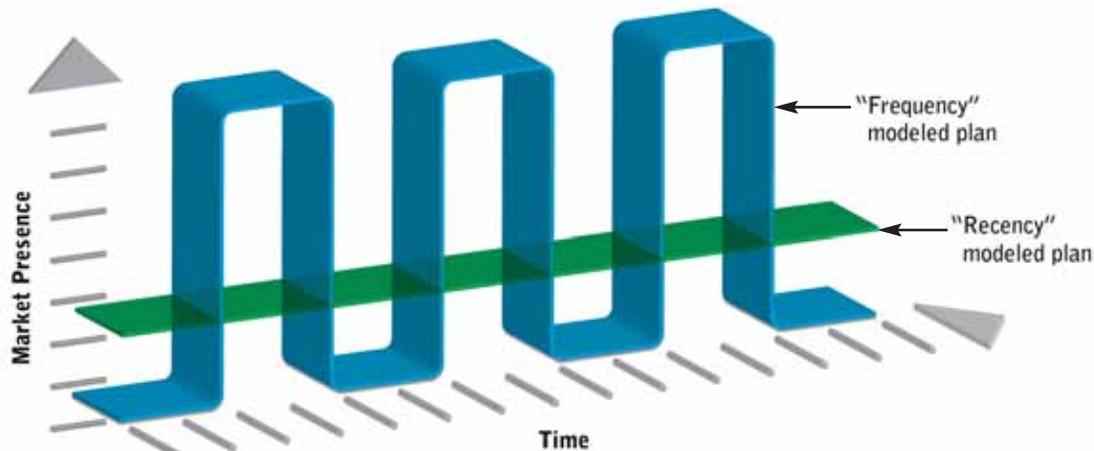
# Message Delivery Strategy: Recency vs. Frequency

## Continuous exposure or occasional high level blasts?

It's a question that marketers often face when creating their marketing mix. Marketers with unlimited budgets could connect with their entire audience virtually non-stop, achieving massive reach and frequency of their message. But most marketers work within limited budgets, so something has to give. When it comes to message delivery strategy, there are basically two options: Frequency and Recency.

Marketers with the goal of reaching people multiple times employ the more traditional Frequency Model, bunching their message delivery into "flights." On the other hand, those favoring continuous exposure of their messages apply the Recency Model (as in how recently, prior to purchase decision, a person has been exposed to a message) to their planning.

### Frequency and Recency Models: Two approaches to message delivery strategy



*Marketers who employ the Recency Model keep their messages continuously in front of the audience.*

### Executive Summary

- Some message delivery plans follow the Frequency Model: you should try to reach people on a frequent basis to achieve three or more exposures.
- Believers in the Frequency Model employ message flights (occasional message blasts) to stretch their budgets as far as possible.
- According to the Recency Model, only one exposure—the most recent—may prompt those in the buying mode to select your product.
- Proponents of the Recency Model emphasize continuous message exposure to reach people "in the market" at the moment they are exposed to the message.

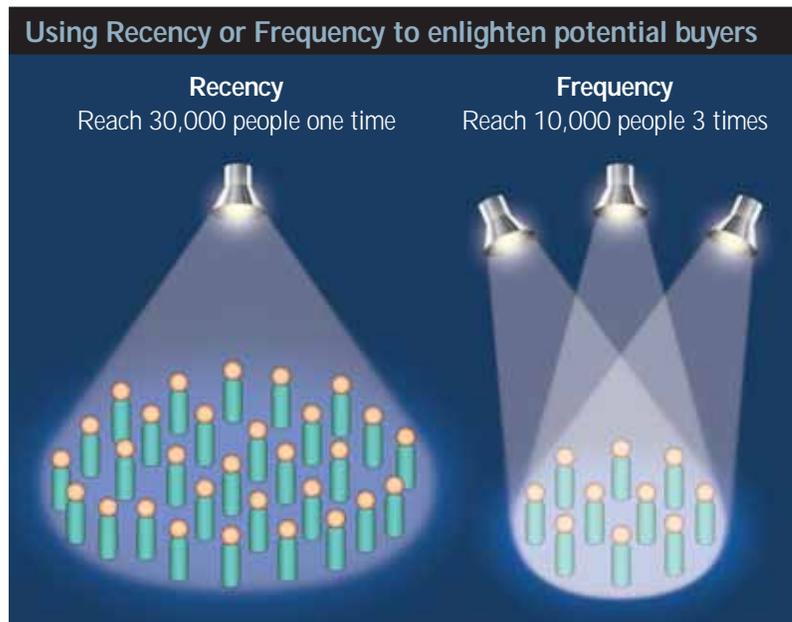
# A closer look at Recency and Frequency: how do both models work?

Using the Recency Model, marketers emphasize continuous message delivery at lower frequency levels—never or rarely dropping out of the market. The Recency Model states that messages work mostly with the small number of people “in the market” at the moment they are exposed to the message.

A proponent of this approach might send out a direct mail package once to 30,000 people instead of mailing monthly to 10,000 people. The thinking here follows author Erwin Ephron's conclusion that reaching three consumers once will result in more sales than repeatedly reaching one consumer—and the costs are the same.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, those who prefer frequency of their messages use occasional blasts of high-repetition (“flights”). The Frequency Model suggests that exposing a person to messages less than three times is wasteful. This model encourages marketers to restrict reach in favor of frequency. Part of the argument for frequency is based on studies that show people need to have exposure to a marketing message 3 to 11 times to remember it.<sup>2</sup>

A marketing plan based on the Frequency Model would reach 10,000 people three times with a message, rather than 30,000 people once. Although flights can vary in structure, at some point there's no activity in a given medium—resulting in zero reach and exposure.



Proponents of the Recency Model believe that it's better for your message to appear before 30,000 people one time than before 10,000 people three times. Those who prefer the Frequency Model believe that exposing a person to messages less than three times is wasteful.

## Recency or Frequency: which is better?

While the Recency Model seems to be the prevailing thinking among many marketers, generally speaking, the net effect of either model is that you should be in front of your audience with regularity. Studies show message frequency still offers a number of benefits, such as:

- Increasing believability of a topic or claim<sup>3</sup>
- Improving recall and recognition of marketing messages<sup>2</sup>
- Enhancing customer attitudes or feelings<sup>4</sup>
- Building awareness of and interest in a company, product or services<sup>5</sup>

Both of these models suggest it takes more than just limited exposure to achieve the desired results. And neither model would support delivering messages a single time and expecting to have much of an impact in the marketplace.

<sup>1</sup> Ephron, E. Media Planning: Recency Planning. *Admap*, February 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ebbinghaus, H. in *Advertising Reach and Frequency* by C. McDonald, NTC Business Books, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Hawkins, S.A. and Hoch, S. J. Low-Involvement Learning: Memory without Evaluation. *Journal of Consumer Research*. September 1992;19:212-225.

<sup>4</sup> Strachan, A. In the Brain of the Beholder. *The Harvard Brain*. 2000;7.

<sup>5</sup> *Marketing Management*. Winter/Spring 1996;4(4):13-14.