



Boontown.
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Untapped & Uncapped

7 Lessons in Marketing to Regional Australia



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MARKETING TO BOOMTOWN

Did you know 9.3 million people, or 36% of the Australian population, now live outside the five major capital cities? Or that regional economic powerhouses such as South East Queensland, Wollongong and the Byron Bay area have been outpacing capital cities for growth? How about the fact 40% of Australia’s economic output is generated by regional cities and towns? Were you aware regional consumers can often have more disposable income than their urban counterparts?

The opportunity for growth in regional Australia is very real. The countermigration of consumers out of metro into regional towns and cities, triggered by Covid, continues post-pandemic. Couple this with the fact 92% of advertisers are achieving ROI when they do make investments into regional areas, and there’s a compelling case for more brands to start building out proactive regional marketing strategies.

In this special guide, we lean into learnings from seven of the nation’s finest marketing leaders who’ve achieved growth by actively upping the ante on regional marketing. Whether it’s Suncorp’s award-winning regional creative and media efforts, Reflections’ 20%+ growth from a fully regional above-the-line campaign, or Tinder’s nationally improved brand sentiment scores off its regional insight-driven ‘Big Rainbow Project’, brands have been winning big by boldly addressing Boomtown audiences.

We hope you enjoy this deep dive into what’s working in regional Australia and the ways your organisation can achieve similar brand dividends.

EXPLAINER:

What is Boomtown?

Boomtown is a media collective powered by Southern Cross Austereo, Win, Seven Network, ARN, ACM, Nine NBN, News Corp and Imparja.

Boomtown represents the 9.3m people living in regional Australia and outside the five capital cities and metro markets. These regional Australians account for around 40% of the national economic output, and one-third of the country’s total workforce. The average age of those who’ve been moving to Boomtown since the pandemic is between 31-38 years old, reflecting a lucrative audience for advertisers.

Despite this, only around 15% of national media budgets are spent regionally. Yet these consumers deserve more consideration from marketers looking for a way to drive growth.

With a lower cost of living due to cheaper housing, the people of Boomtown have both time and disposable income to impart on brands they build an affinity with. What’s more, Boomtown is a less crowded media marketplace, meaning brands can really cut through and build excess share of voice if they make the effort.

Lesson

1 LEVERAGE SIMILARITIES AS WELL AS DIFFERENCES

Like any distinctive cohort brands seek to target, Boomtown audiences exhibit differences worth evaluating in a regional marketing approach. These could stem from geographic factors, such as higher risk of severe weather events or greater distances from compelling cruise offers departing from Sydney or Melbourne.

But it's by recognising both differences and similarities between regional and metro consumers brands gain their best chance of not only channelling mental availability but securing long-lasting brand affinity and engagement.

One big myth persisting around regional Australian audiences is they're attitudinally as well as behaviourally

different to metro ones. For Reflections CMO, Peter Chapman, this couldn't be further from the truth. Research and direct experience in roles across PR firms and agencies such as JWT, Clemenger BBDO and Enigma Communications, through to his current role as marketing chief for the holiday parks operator, have demonstrated regional and metro markets differ very slightly on the bigger attitudinal matters of life.

As an example, Chapman warns against assuming regional consumers aren't going to relate to the same creative showing a Volvo in the Swiss Alps than metro ones. "Many brands frame up regional life in a really unauthentic way, and it misses big time," he says. "We call it looking from the 'outsight', which is the opposite to an insight."



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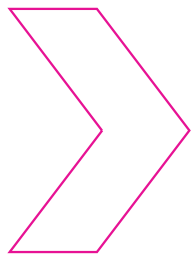
Peter Chapman, CMO, Reflections

> LESSON 1 CONTINUED

Where differences lie are in behaviour. “Regional lives are lived differently; their behaviours change. You need to sympathise with that in the work,” Chapman says.

A notable divergence is regional consumers have more time. “This creates more opportunity to spend more time with your brand – as long as you’re interesting within their world,” Chapman says. “When you move to the regions, your life is still as full of all the things you want to do. You’ve still got work, you work the same hours, you’ve still got all the things your kids are doing. You still have the book club, play recreational sports, go to the gym and visit family and friends.

“What you don’t have is all those other connection pieces taking up so much time. You’re not spending an hour a day in traffic, and a play date is not 45 minutes away.”



9.3m

The number of Australians living in regional Australia, representing 36% of the total population

The Tinder team describes it as identifying the unmet needs of audiences. “Try to understand if their experiences with your product or category are different from the way people in urban centres are experiencing that product. Are there unmet needs in the regions your product can help meet?” Tinder Country Director, Kristen Hardeman, asks.

In the case of Tinder’s ‘Big Rainbow Project’, knowing LGBTIQ+ members are at higher risk of social isolation, active prejudice, discrimination and exclusion directly led to creating a physical landmark of Pride that could live on in a regional town. An interactive voting process and 16,000 votes later, and the Big Rainbow landed in Daylesford, Victoria. Regional audience insight also led Tinder to tell the stories of three regional queer members in a national media and PR campaign, and temporarily lift location-based restrictions in the Tinder app.

Yet partnering this insight with universal human truths like inclusion and belonging ensured Tinder truly engaged with regional audiences. Such an approach also, incidentally, gave Tinder significant uplift in brand sentiment across female consumers outside of regional areas.

“There are really key differences when you’re developing creative for the regions. But those similarities are equally as important if you want a campaign to have legs beyond regional Australia,” Hardeman says. “Working off a regional insight doesn’t mean broader Australia isn’t going to care about what you’re doing.”

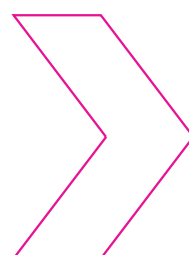
At Flight Centre, longer travel times plus less frequency of travel factor into product offerings targeting regional audiences, as well as the way it promotes them. Adding flight credit or a night’s accommodation before a cruise departs, for example, is a product tweak Flight Centre will make to target regional audiences.

In the case of Flight Centre’s ‘Your Top of the World Centre | North America and Europe Sale’ campaign in early 2023, a key insight was longer durations from regional hubs. These impact the consideration phase as well as type of product purchased. But as Global Head of Marketing, Clinton Hearne, sees it, regional consumers are still keen on going on holiday, and they still fancy an overseas trip or cruise.

“Our media buying had to make sure we were referencing deals we were putting into market specific to regional consumers, and that showed we had the right product for what those audiences were trying to access,” Hearne says.

Suncorp is well aware of distinctive risk factors in regional areas. These provided creative inspiration for a wealth of successful campaigns, such as the ‘One House’ project and ‘Resilience Road’ sequel. “I suspect different nuances and insights could be tapped by pretty much every brand and every category,” Suncorp Group EGM Brand and Marketing, Mim Haysom, says.

However, Suncorp’s marketing team knows everyone needs insurance. “It’s really important we make sure we’re educating customers all across Australia, and we’re engaging and servicing them with products and services they need,” Haysom adds. “So for us, metro and regional have always been equally important – in some cases, even more so in regional.”



11%

Boomtown’s population growth in the last 10 years

Lesson

2

EMPHASISE
MARKETING
EFFECTIVENESS
OVER REACH

A hefty inhibitor to buying media in regional areas is perceived economies of scale around reach. As Guzman y Gomez (GyG) CMO, Lara Thom, puts it, buying a spot on a metro radio station may cover more restaurants. Yet local marketing imperatives and a charter to directly support franchisees wherever they are located ensures the QSR has ongoing regional media and advertising investment.

“The economy of scale I can get from spending on Sydney radio might cover 40 restaurants. But I’ve got to spend on Wagga radio too, and I’ll just cover one restaurant. That doesn’t mean a regional restaurant should suffer. You’ve got to pay them back equally,” Thom says.

Results prove this approach is working for GyG. Rather than concentrate on top-level reach or impressions, Thom is using transaction numbers, volume of people coming through the doors, revenue increases, app sign-ups and drive-through figures to demonstrate effectiveness of marketing activities.

Then there’s the fact buying regional media is clearly cheaper and less cluttered. Today, around 15% of media dollars get spent on regional areas. This is despite regional audiences making up 36% of the population.

For Reflections, demonstrating the impact of growing share of market was critical in gaining executive buy-in for its first regional above-the-line marketing campaign



“For us, metro and regional have always been equally important - in some cases, even more so in regional.”

Mim Haysom, EGM Brand and Marketing, Suncorp Group

> LESSON 2 CONTINUED

last year. The fact 65% of Reflections' audience lives in regional areas certainly helped too.

The marketing team's first step was benchmarking how the market and competitors were spending. "Secondly, we talked about the idea that growing share of voice will grow share of market. We lent on empirical data that exists, particularly through *The Long and the Short* of It work by Les Binet and Peter Field in the UK," Chapman explains.

"This says the more effective advertising you put into market, the more you will build your market share. If you make that argument well, you then look at regional Australia and say buying share of voice, which we all agree will help us gain market share, is cheaper and more effective in those markets."

Mental availability for an impulse category like biscuits makes regional media a no-brainer for Arnott's. Yet it took 12 months of solid work and a restructuring of the marketing strategy to find the funds to make this a reality. Changes included moving to a more continuous, always-on media plan, as well as broadening targeting on every media buy instead of for specific brands in the portfolio.

"We went to a much less fragmented model, where we had fewer messages on for longer against a broader target audience," says Arnott's CMO, Jenni Dill. "As we did that, it fundamentally changed the cost of every impression, plus the cost of reach. That allowed us to create the room to be almost always-on, more often, for more of our people and more of the population, more of the time."

Suncorp's concerted efforts to create targeted campaigns using regional insights, media channels and creative lifted brand consideration, positive sentiment and customer quotes across its brands, plus won creative and effectiveness awards. These included Cannes Lions for 'AAMI Warning Spots', which geotargeted consumers on driving holidays in regional areas in order to reduce accidents due to fatigue; the follow-up, 'AAMI Rest Towns'; and the 'One House' project promoting resilience.

"We've actually found the more targeted, bespoke and creative you are with regional audiences, the greater the impact," Haysom says.

Boomtown's professional make-up



37%

Regional consumers who have a professional or management role. The three most popular occupations are professionals (18.1%), technicians and trade workers (14.9%) and managers (13.5%).



Top 3

sectors of employment in regional Australia are healthcare (15.5%), retail trade (9.4%) and construction (9.4%).



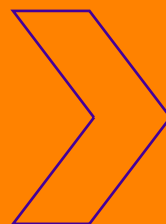
1.8%

Percentage increase of employed people in regional Australia between 2016 and 2021.



54.7%

Regional Australians who are employed full-time. 33.1% work part-time and 7.4% are employed away from work.



4.7%

Boomtown residents who are unemployed, compared to 5.1% of metro Australia.

Lesson

3

TEST AND TRY THINGS OUT

Rethinking the marketing budget isn't for the faint-hearted, and finding solid figures to back bigger regional marketing investments is necessary for most spend strapped marketing teams today. Which is why test-and-learn is crucial to build confidence in how campaigns focused on regional audiences can perform.

Boomtown's 14 regional cities, such as Newcastle in NSW or Geelong in Victoria, are good sample sizes for trials. For brands like Tinder, taking a regional insight and starting small provided the wins needed to build bravery and go bigger with its 'Big Rainbow Project' campaign.

Tinder's first regional foray was in fact 'Pride Ride', a campaign taking individuals from regional areas who had never celebrated Pride before on a road trip across regional NSW then Sydney on a double decker bus.

"It was the reception we got from that campaign that gave us more confidence to go in even harder with that insight for round two and bring the Big Rainbow Project to life," Hardeman says.

Haysom advocates for regional Australia as an opportunity to innovate, whether it's creatively or as trial markets. "There's so much potential in how you can think about taking ideas and testing them in regional markets. There's lot of opportunity to pull through into brand, business, customer, creativity and innovation."

If your budget is stressed, then it's time to test, agrees Dill. "Lean in, pick a regional market. Make sure you've got metrics so you can measure the impact of it, and make sure you've got a model that works and you can continue to invest in," she advises. "It's often much easier to find the budget for a test than a full national rollout."



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Jenni Dill, CMO, Arnott's Group

Lesson

4

CONNECT TO YOUR BRAND PURPOSE

There are more altruistic motives for brands to up spend on regional audiences and media too. In Tinder's case, being Australia's largest dating app with a brand purpose of being inclusive means it can't just be seen to address metro consumers.

"I don't think you can be a truly inclusive brand if you're only engaging with people in the top five cities," Hardeman says. "At Tinder, we have this fundamental belief everyone deserves a chance at a meaningful connection with someone new. That extends to every single Australian, whether you're in regional areas or one of the cities."

Promoting equal access to the outdoors is a Reflections brand imperative naturally lending itself to better

regional audience engagement. This egalitarianism is illustrated in advertising, creative and brand positioning. It's also reflected in Reflections' loyalty program, which has been crafted without VIP status or point-based membership tiers.

"It suits our business to be really democratic with the way we look at the markets," Chapman says.

"By its nature, adventure, tourism, camping and outdoors activity is a very democratic, egalitarian pursuit. When you are camping with your set up next to someone else doing the same thing, it doesn't matter where you're from. You are really equal in that moment. That's a beautiful thing about the outdoors and something we lean into heavily."



"There is a massive opportunity in marketing to regional areas, as you'll find a lot of these consumers overlap with metro audiences in terms of values, opinions and habits."

Aaliah Eggins-Bryson, Head of Marketing and Product, Belong

Lesson

5

GET CREATIVE
WITH MEDIA
TARGETING AND
MESSAGING

Of course, media consumption and channels preferred by regional audiences can differ, as can the moments they're engaging with these mediums. Regional consumers are still spending more time watching TV and listening to radio than metro audiences, for instance, as well as on social media.

"It's important to get in front of the right eyeballs and ears," Belong Head of Product and Marketing, Aaliah Eggins-Bryson, says.

Belong moved to targeting regional audiences in TV at the beginning of FY21. Previously, it had a metro-only approach. This was despite 30 per cent of Belong's core audiences being based in regional areas.

"So they're a hugely important part of our business and, therefore, we've rethought our process in recent years," says Eggins-Bryson. "Understanding how important an audience regionally is has impacted how we do our media, and since 2021, we've started using out-of-home, radio, digital and TV to reach audiences in these areas."

Chapman calls it "creative media targeting" and knowing when to pull which media lever. Rather than a 'ta-da' moment in tailored messaging, he sees brands needing to be creative with how they choose channels.

In Reflections' first-ever regional-first media plan, the business used the same national brand platform celebrating the outdoors, 'Life's Better Outside' to underpin creative and messaging.



"You're always going to have micro-influencers in a local area. That can come down to the local radio team getting behind you or not."

Lara Thom, CMO, Guzman y Gomez

> LESSON 5 CONTINUED

“What we found to be successful is you build the same kind of creative idea and creative platform, which should be ladder up to a higher, human truth,” Chapman says. “But the way you place and frame it in regional markets is different. That becomes more of a media discussion than a creative one. Sometimes it’s about the creative use of media.”

For example, in the metro markets in radio, Reflections might buy peak periods and traffic reports to target people wanting to go on holidays. “The great insight there is those consumers will be most frustrated with their busy city lives when they’re sitting in traffic,” Chapman comments. “We wouldn’t do that in regional NSW. But you might serve really similar creative.”

For Thom, it’s not just about buying media, but recognising the intangible value storytelling, PR and authenticity that comes with regional channel choice, messaging and local area activities. She’s one of several marketers recognising the additional effort regional media teams put into supporting brands who support them and their local communities.

Community sport has been another powerful regional lever for GyG, and the brand supports 200 sporting clubs nationally this year from NRL to cricket, AFL and netball.

Yet Suncorp does spot regional context as something brands can use to differentiate on creative. The ‘One House’ and ‘Resilience Road’ campaigns boasted of messaging targeted to regional audiences and the weather perils they’re at most risk of facing. Results were impressive, including +10-point in brand consideration with customers, +12-point with non-Suncorp customers, and a 25% rise in customer quotes.

“It had a profound brand and business impact, as seen through our tracking and marketing mix modelling,” Haysom says. “It just goes to show the power of a really strong insight, then developing something that creates true and meaningful value for customers. The other thing I’d say is regional audiences appreciate being thought about.”

5 category opportunities in Boomtown:

AUTO: A higher percentage of Boomtown travels to work by car (71% versus 63.5% of metro) and over half of homes in regional Australia have two or more vehicles. Not surprisingly, Boomtown has a higher consideration for all major car brands than metro consumers, and they’re 12 times more likely to buy an SUV.

RETAIL AND ECOMMERCE: When surveyed, 26% of Boomtown had spent more than \$500 online in the previous six months. Seven of the top 12 postcodes for online shopping in Australia are in Boomtown. Interestingly, regional Australians tend to shop later, with 32% of purchases made between 7pm – 10pm.

FINANCE: 38% of metro and 30% of regional Australians have a household income of more than \$100,000. Two-thirds are looking to invest or have investments.

TRAVEL: Regional Australia is responsible for more than 45% of domestic tourism. Yet more than half are still preferring to travel internationally. Half belong to a frequent flyer program.

FMCG: Regional grocery buyers spend more at the supermarket, with two-thirds spending at least \$100 per week. And they’re visiting supermarkets at the same, if not higher, frequency than metro consumers.

Sources: Source: ADX Motor Vehicle, Jan - Dec 2018; Australia Post, Inside Australian Online Shopping, eCommerce Industry Report, 2019; SCA iQ | Consumer Sentiment Study | May 2022; Nielsen CMV Survey 10, 2019

15 INSIGHTS INTO REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN MEDIA CONSUMPTION

64%

Boomtown residents who listen to commercial radio every week

62%

Boomtown residents who often visit local websites and social media pages to keep up to date on their local communities

89%

Boomtown consumers who listen to the radio on the way to the shops

3.7m

Australians who read regional newspapers every month

70%

Boomtown residents who see local newspapers as strong supporters of their communities

6.4m

Monthly audience reach of regional digital news media

43%

Regional Australians who believe TV keeps them informed about products and services relevant to them

53%

Regional Australians who see content in regional newspapers as the most trusted source of information

8 in 10

Boomtown residents
watching free-to-air TV each
week

66km

The average distance
Boomtown audiences travel
on a typical weekday

82%

Who see local radio stations
as strong supporters of their
community

**77% and
52%**

Regional Australians
who believe radio and
newspapers keep them
informed about products and
services relevant to them,
respectively

46%

Boomtown residents who say
billboards bring new products
and information to their attention

67%

Regional Australians exposed
to billboards in an average
week

**74 hours
20 minutes**

The average TV viewing of
Boomtown audiences each
month, 6 hours above the
national average

Lesson

6

AUTHENTICITY
AND COMMUNITY
ARE PARAMOUNT

Being thoughtful is the sixth lesson: Regional audiences can't wait to engage with brands that demonstrate value to their communities. All marketers agree regional consumers have engaged with their brands at above-average rates when they've made the effort to connect authentically.

A key way is to harness regional talent, ambassadors and staff. Both GyG and Flight Centre do this through targeted media and marketing activities, heroing local store managers, franchise owners and staff in creative and communications. Direct calls to action highlighting local store locations is another critical ingredient.

Don't underestimate the power of micro-influence in a regional location either. Winning positive local word-of-mouth is absolutely vital to GyG's business because it can make or break commercial success.

"You're always going to have micro-influencers in a local area. That can come down to the local radio team getting behind you or not," Thom says. "You therefore have to be hyper-aware of what your brand means to people in local areas and how that resonates."

Thom points to elevating a local store owner's credentials and commitment to community in everything from creative to PR and marketing.

"There's a real, local nuance around what's going on when we open a store, but especially in country towns. They don't have the businesses, hype and that buzz of city life. So when GyG does open, it's a really big deal," Thom says. "We're finding the influence these [regional customers] have over one another is far greater than what you see in the CBD. Word of mouth is everything in regional areas."



"Try to understand if their experiences with your product or category are different from the way people in urban centres are experiencing that product. Are there unmet needs in the regions your product can help meet?"

Kristen Hardeman, Country Director, Tinder

Lesson

7

TAKE AN AUDIENCE-FIRST APPROACH

Whatever the category, taking an audience-first approach to planning and buying media provides the best framework when seeking to build engagement in regional areas. Because like any modern marketing today, taking a one-size-fits-all approach is fraught with danger.

“The truth is, regional can mean many things: Regional audiences are a diverse mix of people – in age, income, ethnicity and interests. There is a massive opportunity in marketing to regional areas, as you’ll find a lot of these consumers overlap with metro audiences in terms of values, opinions and habits,” Eggins-Bryson says.

It’s for this reason brands should ensure research panels and focus groups are peopled by representatives from actual places they’re targeting. Belong and Reflections, for instance, overindex on regional consumers to gain statistically significant numbers they can drill down into.

“Belong has a number of propositions and product lines we are yet to trial in regional, and we are excited to do this in the near future. We’re keen to highlight our wider range to regional audiences and reiterate to them that they have options,” Eggins-Bryson says. “To do this impactfully, we need to assess regional audiences and market to them appropriately, and through mediums that make the most sense.”



“Our media buying had to make sure we were referencing deals we were putting into market specific to regional consumers, and that showed we had the right product for what those audiences were trying to access.”

Clinton Hearne, Global Head of Marketing, Flight Centre

THANK YOU TO OUR MARKETING THOUGHTLEADERS



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Reflections



Mim Haysom
EGM Brand and Marketing
Suncorp Group



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