'Breaking Down Barriers' – MRG Conference, Berlin. November 2014.

The Media Research Group's 50th anniversary conference was held in Berlin, an inspired choice coinciding with the city's very own historic anniversary.

The conference theme 'Breaking down barriers' was appropriately titled for a media research community grappling with the many challenges created by disruption and convergence across the industry.

Irrespective of being a connected digital pure play or a legacy publisher/broadcaster, there were many common issues being tackled, mostly related to researching the characteristics of multi-platform audiences and how they are best understood and synthesised to deliver results.

In evidence throughout the conference were a variety of research tools and methodologies used to get at answers and develop new hypothesis.

Interestingly in the world of 'big data', there continues to be a significant reliance on the more established research methodologies necessary to extract that all important reference point and context that data on its own often struggles to surface. The two are by no means mutually exclusive and the trick will be leveraging the benefits of both.

Closer to home, a panel debate was staged with the Heads of each of the Industry JIC's. A variety of topic areas were discussed including an update on how each is keeping pace with the multi- platform environment.

Collectively, it is very evident that the JIC's have been investing in an active programme of development driven by the new market reality.

When looked at within this context, the Radio industry is comparatively well placed having adapted throughout the recent period of rapid change.

There has been significant innovation in Radio services transforming distribution and accessibility to create the anytime, anywhere, any how content and brand experience that radio today offers its audience.

All the main legacy media measurement systems have been exposed to some degree of disruption caused by new platforms, something that Radio has largely been able to avoid as its methodology measures what goes into people's ears not a specific technology.

RAJAR has incorporated into its core currency the measurement of the new platforms (online, DAB and DTV) ensuring continuity in maintaining a single source measurement across both online and offline.

At the heart of this is the methodology not having been overwhelmed by hyper fragmentation caused by an explosion of stations. The number of stations measured has remained remarkably stable as new stations launched have been compensated by ownership consolidation and the creation of network brands.

As a consequence, the all- important 'respondent load' hasn't increased significantly. The average listener's station repertoire despite a wider range of choice is still around 3 stations.

Investment has been targeted at enhancing the core measurement. The front end sample recruitment process has benefitted from the introduction of CAPI (computer assisted personalised interviews) and taking the measurement online has produced efficiencies in the important process but also improved the accuracy of the data completion.

Over 50% of respondents choose to participate online. Interviewers now have an online management dashboard allowing better respondent monitoring. The online design and completion protocols have led to improvements in reducing unattributed platform listening and Completion rates are presently at their highest ever level.

Building on this, in a world of continuous improvement, there are further enhancements planned for 2015.

RAJAR is extending its online format to mobile and tablet. This will then provide the full suite of data input device and this choice will further enhance the online uptake and appeal of the survey.

Also in recognition that radio is part of a much wider audio market, RAJAR is now measuring listening beyond radio. It's important to understand how audiences are behaving across this wider spectrum.

In February next year a new wave of the supplementary survey 'MIDASplus' will be published providing insight into listening , devices and activities, across all audio types. The Internet Advertising Bureau has recently begun to use this new data set. The data is very rich and to facilitate ease of access, a new interactive analyses tool is being launched for subscribers, designed to simplify complex journeys into the data and produce the visualisation of results.

All in all it is fair to say that measurement is on a very exciting journey. Perhaps a future theme for the next MRG conference may evolve from 'Breaking down barriers' to 'Building bridges' that can connect the new routes to measurement and insight together.