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General Mills brand integrations lead to big sales lifts in study

Old El Paso and Honey Nut Cheerios saw sales rise more than 20% from certain product placements on TV

By [Jack Neff](#).

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Credit: El Paso

Brand placements don't just remind people about brands with fleeting glances during shows. They also have significant impact on brand sales, according to a study of General Mills placements by TV analytics firm 605 for brand integrator platform BEN Group.

Linear TV integrations for General Mills brands Old El Paso and Honey Nut Cheerios in 2019 through 2021 delivered sales lifts of 24% to 29% among households where people who saw them versus people who didn't, according to 605, which combines audience data from set-top boxes and smart TVs with sales data from retail loyalty programs.

Integrations for Old El Paso included a segment on Food Network cooking show "Rachael Ray" and the brand's taco shells showing up during mealtime in Lifetime holiday film "Rediscovering Christmas." Sales rose 27% among viewers who saw the integrations versus unexposed audiences, per 605. The impact was slightly less for viewers ages 18-34 (up 24%) but much higher for households with income of \$50,000 and at least one child 18 or younger (up 46%).

Honey Nut Cheerios did a little better when a cereal box showed up in the CBS sitcom "Mom." The brand's sales got a lift of 27% among exposed audiences, including 29% for people 18-34 but a more modest 14% across the \$50,000 income households with at least one kid.

"New advances in measurement have revealed the tangible impact of product placement programs on critical business outcomes, such as sales lift, against consumer groups that drive our businesses and brands," says Mikhala Nelson, entertainment partnerships lead at General Mills. The company will stick with product placements because they "leave lasting impressions of our brands with consumers," she says.

Measuring the sales impact of [brand integrations](#) has been [more challenging](#) than with traditional 30-second spots, says Erin Schmidt, chief product placement officer at BEN (an acronym derived from Branded Entertainment Network). But she believes the 605 data show brand integrations can perform at least as well as ads.

One of the issues making it hard to measure impact from brand integrations, even in linear TV programming, is that the effect can last months or years into the future as the integrations keep showing up in repeats, streaming and delayed DVR viewing. That measurement challenge is even greater for pure streaming content, where any ROI analysis will inevitably miss some long-term impact.

That's why simply doing a sales lift analysis based on timing of brand placements, for example using a marketing mix model, isn't as effective as measuring the impact over time among millions of smart TV and set-top box users in 605's panel. Kristin Dolan, founder and CEO of 605, says the firm was also able to measure impact across multiple performance indicators, including web traffic and retail visits, in addition to sales.

The upside of streaming integrations, beyond linear TV, "is that you have this long tail of viewership impact, so there's so much opportunity that comes from making [an appearance] inside of the content," Schmidt says.

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