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"ISCI"Is Now "Ad-ID"; "Cart" Number Is Now "Cut" Number - But The Change Is At A Snail's Pace

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By TDGA Traffic Digest Staff
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"ISCI Code" or "Ad-ID"; "Cart" Number or "Cut" Number - The Nomenclature Changes At A Snail's Pace

(San Juan Capistrano CA – May 1, 2005) – TDGA, The Traffic Directors Guild of America is frequently the source of terms and definitions for both Radio and Television, as viewed from the perspective of the Traffic Director or Traffic Managers. "Traffic" is a homonym (an identically spelled and pronounced word, but with a different meaning) The Traffic we control is not the highway condition report for commuters, but the Department within broadcasting that schedules hundreds of announcements, commercials and programs on your favorite stations. It's at the center of the business flow chart of all Broadcast stations.

Both Radio and TV Stations are influenced by a myriad of interests. Advertising Agencies have one "language" and despite efforts to translate them to the "broadcast language", there are other influences and market forces that can make it a very slow process.

Part of the problem lies in the software used as a tool in the traffic process. For years, broadcasters used tape cartridges to play their spots and other pre-recorded announcements. Rather than wade through a sea of cartridges, a numbering system was obviously called for. But, let's say you were scheduling Coca-Cola. The next question was whether it was Classic Coke, Diet Coke, Cherry Coke, Caffeine-free Diet Coke, or Vanilla Coke? So we needed to not only designate a "Cart Number" to tell us which cartridge to play when the Coke spot was called for—we also had to be certain we were playing the correct Coke product as instructed by the Agency.

The software vendors that create the software systems to help Traffic actually simply responded to the customer's wishes and started calling the number for the proper cartridge—a "cart" number. Stations loved it. The Cart number was the perfect name for a number on a "cart."

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Agencies started assigned a specific number to every single individual commercial they created. The name was a little more obtuse—but that's where **the "ISCI" number was born.** "ISCI" by the way means "Industry Standard Commercial Instructions". Most consumers know another "ISCI", which is the International Standard Coding Identification much more appropriately called a "bar code."

So, what's the problem? Well, first broadcasting has gone digital and rarely still uses the analog taped cartridges—thus no more "carts". But software is so entrenched in thousands of stations, and unlike the end-user, software code is usually not very friendly to a "Search and Replace" command like we PS users might think. Thus—even though there are no more carts (figuratively that is) the term "Cart Number" lives, thrives and is the name used more often than not for what should probably be called a **Digital Cut Number**. (DCN). We just ran a Google and came up with 855,000 uses of DCN. We could shorten the name to CN for Cut Number, but there are 58,200,000 CN's already found by our Google.

(Not to confuse you further, but to Google, now means to search for... Don't ask its another article for a rainy day.)


 The logo for Ad-ID features the word "Ad-ID" in a stylized font. "Ad" is in red and "ID" is in blue. A small globe icon is positioned above the letter "i".

And, not only are Traffic personnel protective of their turf, so are advertising agencies. In fact, while both seek to make buying and scheduling as easy a process as possible, they live in a world of acronyms. So, for ISCI, it was bound to change. **The new name says the AAAA, shall be and is forevermore to be known as Ad-ID.** Again, this is a perfectly normal change and it literally calls the number or code exactly what it is—an Advertising identification number.

Again, software manuals, help screens and on-screen fields frequently refers to that specific spot as an ISCI because that's what the software vendors were told by their customers that ISCI was the most common term for it.

"As you consider the nomenclature, please note that the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) and the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) owned and operated the ISCI system for about 15 years. When Ad-ID was introduced by the two Associations as an upgrade to the ISCI system, we officially closed the ISCI operation." This was the opening of an e-mail received by TDGA recently from John Kaiser, of AAAA.

"No new ISCI prefixes will ever be issued again," continued Kaiser. "The industry is migrating to Ad-ID, the trafficking and billing systems are changing lexicon as are major media groups. Hundreds of companies are currently using Ad-ID, which is a little over a year old, and most of the large agencies are or will be moving to the new industry standard identifier. I would encourage you to make note of it."

So: Cart Numbers have been replaced by Digital Cut Number; and "ISCI" has been replaced by "Ad-ID" Got it?

Now, all we have to do is wait for software companies to embed the new terminology in systems being used that are no longer updated, or no longer under support agreements. (Meaning: it is impossible) Oh, and try to change the terminology used by Traffic people that have been using the terms for 15 or more years in their daily business life. That might be more attainable than changing the software codes.

By the way, the above followed multiple exchanges that began with TDGA being asked by an Advertising Agency, if we could direct them to the proper spot to have an ISCI number assigned to a spot they were distributing. TDGA hears from all aspects of our Industry, not just Traffic. We point this out simply because it was not a Radio or TV person using the term ISCI—it was an Advertising Agency.



The preceding paragraph makes our point—the entire Industry needs a common language. To eliminate the buyer, the rep at the station's rep firm, the station sales department or the traffic and continuity personnel at a station would defeat the entire process. The goal, remember, is speaking the same language. Ad-ID has been endorsed by RAB, TVB, ANA, and a rather lengthy list of organizations. (Don't worry about running out of codes, there are currently 4.7 quadrillion combinations in the Ad-ID System and that can be increased if ever needed. See www.ad-id.org if you're really into the nuts and bolts of this, but the point is to start using the term in place of ISCI.

Another culprit, we believe, lies in a lack of training for advertising "buyers" at the Agency level and not all Traffic personnel have been "certified". Both of these possible problems are fairly easily solved. "Actually, we'd like to see a Certification process for Buyers, at least extensive enough to bring their language and understanding of the media and mediums they buy onto the same plateau as the Traffic staff that must attempt to do translations of their own." So said TDGA's Larry Keene. "TDGA would be pleased to put together a quick, painless Buyer Certification process in cooperation with the RAB and TVB.

And new Traffic personnel need two forms of "training". First in the business itself and then by the vendors of the sometimes complex software systems developed as a tool to assist the Traffic staff. With millions of dollars at stake, traffic personnel need to know *more* than which button to push to perform a function, they need the traffic skills and education that usually comes from years of on-the-job experience. "We take our half of the training equation seriously," said Keene.

Now... about "pods" versus spot sets. We highly recommend the TDGA Radio-TV Glossary, created by the men and women of our industry and containing the contributions of Agencies, Reps, Radio, TV, Newspapers and Computer experts. It is updated on a continuous basis. (Yes, it contains "cart number", "ISCI" and cross-references Ad-ID back to ISCI so you don't get confused.)