

Content With The Content?

So here we are, halfway through 2006, and everyday seems to present a new statistic, regarding the growth of Ipod, satellite, and internet radio listening. Plus, the technology is growing by leaps and bounds with new streaming features for cellphones, Ipods, etc. All of these advances are driving the concern levels ever higher of those involved in terrestrial radio. Terrestrial radio has every right to be concerned. The number of alternative sources for entertainment has been increasing faster than anyone would have imagined. Articles here in fmqb, sessions at NAB, Conclave, and CRS in the past year have all addressed these points...leaving that looming question dangling out there for all to ponder: what can terrestrial radio do about it? "Radio should do more research!" (just couldn't pass that one up). Ask your listeners what they want and give it to them. It's not that complicated.

The "C" Word

Many successful radio groups are researching what their listeners want from terrestrial radio. A common response heard from many studies, especially with the younger demos: 'there's nothing on the radio for me.' In a word---Content. Are you content with your content? If 'no', at least you realize it and know something should be done about it. If 'yes', just beware of the other "C" word---complacency.

How should you address the issue of 'content' on your radio station? Know your audience and know what they want. Their Ipod is a jukebox that plays thousands of songs in a row. Wall to wall music can also be found on the satellite radio providers. Terrestrial radio's answer isn't to try and out-jukebox these devices. Terrestrial radio needs to give its listeners reasons to stay connected with it.

From the TV Handbook

I look to television as a perfect example. Cable and satellite TV offer numerous outlets for news, headline news, prime news, etc. But viewers still turn to their local news affiliate on a daily basis. Why? It's not the studios and the anchorperson's comb-over. Cable news outlets like CNN and Fox News possess both the polished presentation, along with newsrooms that fit the role. Viewers want to know what's going on in their own community from their own local TV stations. Radio can use this model to its advantage in creating content that will entice listeners to keep coming back. Hour long news blocks on your radio station is not what I'm suggesting. I'm talking about being plugged in to your listeners' community. Listeners want content that applies to them. If your station can serve up that dose of local content your listeners are starving for, you've got the ammo that no Ipod, internet, or satellite channel can provide.

Get In Bed With Your Listeners

So often, you'll hear the words, "local content," spoken as the solution. But then you're left with no examples, or idea generators. Not this time. Some of these are suggestions/ideas that may work in your market. Every radio market in the country has its very own local figures of prominence. Why not get those people involved in your radio station's plan to be local? Whether it's the town mayor, or the smoking hot weather babe on the 6 o'clock news, ask them to do some on-air phoners, and/or studio appearances on a regular basis. If your radio station discusses shows like *American Idol* or *Lost* regularly, get that local celeb involved. Your radio station can be more of a platform to allow their true personality to shine, and can create a buzz amongst your listeners...especially if you have the town mayor talking about Idol contestants and hosts in ways you may not have expected. If this becomes a daily or weekly feature in morning or afternoon drive, you just may be tapping into something local and unique enough to drive listenership. "New music picks of the week" may be something your listeners could enjoy playing along with...making it even more entertaining as your night jock and the local TV weather babe are going at it over which is the best track on the new Tool album. Even with all of the technological advances currently being made, the basic premise hasn't changed. Give your listeners content they enjoy on a regular basis and watch your station's audience grow. Get them talking about your radio station, and keep them coming back for more. Go after skate rat listeners by pinning your morning host against the local skate shop owner trash talking and challenging the other to a skate park competition. If little league baseball is big in your area, invite those people on the air---coaches, players, etc. Involve them in chatter about 'Idol', the new Tool CD, or ask them which TV station has the hottest anchors, weather people, etc. You could weave any kind of scenario. Put your midday jock up against a little league pitcher, and clock their pitch speeds. Build this up on-air with training tips (*for your DJ from the pitcher*), listener guesses on who will come out on top, etc. The listening effect could ripple from teammates, to friends, opposing teams, coaches, parents, etc.

Seize The Opportunity To Be Present

Be visible. It's summertime! Whatever your listeners like doing, make sure your station is on-site being part of it. Whether it's the weekly clam shucking contest, boating on the lake, or the beer soaked softball league (again, get the local celebs involved), your station needs to be on-site cranking up the sound system. Consider it understood that your air personalities are local celebs (so much so that some may demand a talent fee to walk across the parking lot...you know who they are). Seriously though, the more they're involved in the community, the more prominent they become. If you've got a jock that's also a volunteer fireman---tremendous! I was never a fireman (and never demanded a talent fee for walking across a parking lot), but I did get out among the masses on my own time, made mention of it on-air, and grew an audience that had more in common with me than just clam shucking and frosty mug chugging. As a road race runner, I would enter local races, plug them on-air, and take calls from fellow racers talking briefly about anything. "What one song was looped in your head during the entire race?"

“Gatorade or beer at the finish line?” “ How much?” “What kind?” Etc. You get the idea. The key is to keep all listeners interested and involved.

Brainstorm and Implement

Hopefully you can glean some ideas from the examples above. Think of ways to apply them to your station that will engage your audience. These are the kinds of ideas that the Ipod, satellite, and internet radio can't touch. If your radio station is really there for the listeners---prove it! Provide local content they'll devour and crave more of. Maybe future rounds of statistics regarding listening patterns may show the growth and rejuvenation of terrestrial radio.