

Library Testing: Engine Maintenance

Almost all of you buy gas for your car at least once a week (as it keeps getting more expensive). Many of you get your car serviced every 3000 – 5000 miles, or every 90 days; check the tires, belts, fluids, etc. Don't forget the lifeblood of your car---the oil. Proper oil maintenance prolongs the life of your car's engine. Let it go without any attention or care, and you could be putting your engine's level of performance in jeopardy. Your radio station is a similar machine. Think of your music library as the lifeblood of your radio station. Without this vital part being maintained, your *radio station's* level of performance may be in jeopardy. Maintenance varies from station to station. Some GMs and PDs understand the value and importance of music research---asking the listeners what they think (doing timely check-ups) while there are some who like to believe everything's just fine until the ratings take a dive (the engine blows up). The expense of attempting to regain your audience (rebuilding an engine) versus timely maintenance (library testing) can be quite costly. As you're reading this, I'm sure you believe in timely check-ups to maintain a healthy music library.

The Goal

Higher ratings! That's great, but how will you do that? By playing music that ***your target audience*** wants to hear, your station can achieve higher ratings. Library safe lists are collections of the most played songs by format based on national airplay. The idea behind these lists is that these songs are top testers because of the amount of airplay each of these titles receives. Sound like a leap of faith? If you're fighting a flu, would you visit a doctor to receive your own prescribed medicine, or would you decide to use what everyone else is using? Many times, safe lists are used as a starting point for a station without a music research budget. The hope is that a station may be able to "hit the broad side of the barn" in delivering what the target audience wants to hear. Focusing your station's music on ***your target audience*** will help you "hit the bullseye" of what they want to hear. This will help your station drive time spent listening in achieving the higher ratings goal.

Recruitment

Your station's format and local competitive situation can be determining factors in who you want to recruit for your test. Your GM and GSM can be a valuable part of the decision making process of who to recruit. Remember, they are the ones using the ratings to drive the station's revenue. Knowing the key demos and gender breakdowns the sales department is targeting will help determine who to recruit. If you have a consultant, he/she can also be an integral part of recruitment decisions. They can assist you in deciding the percentage of P1 listeners versus P2 listeners as well as music montage selection that best represents your format.

Sample Size

Due to station budgets, like everything else in your radio station, sample sizes have changed for library testing. For a while, the industry standard was to have a 100 person sample for a library test. Because budgets have changed in recent years, many stations have gone to sample sizes of 90 or 80. Again, sample size is decided upon by the radio station, as is demos, gender, P1s/P2s. Kelly Music Research suggests using a sample size of at least 80.

Method

There are many reliable methods for a station to test its library. The Auditorium Music Test, Research Facility Test, Callout, and Living Room Music Test are among some of these methods. Each method has its own set of pluses and minuses. The Auditorium Music Test and Research Facility Test seats your recruited sample of respondents together in one room to hear and score the songs you selected to have tested. Some programmers like this method because it allows you to see who your respondents are. A growing issue with these methods is recruitment difficulty. Many people's schedules have become too busy to agree to set time aside from their daily routine to be at an auditorium or research facility for two to three hours on any day of the week. Because of recruitment difficulty, incentive costs have risen sharply while achieving a sample of respondents that is random has declined. Monetary incentives for the Auditorium Music Test and Research Facility Test are ranging from \$50 - \$135 per respondent. Rising incentive costs, room rental, and moderator expenses has driven the price of these tests to be more expensive than other methods.

Callout Testing and the Living Room Music Test allow a randomly recruited sample to hear and score the songs you selected to test at home. Some programmers are concerned that they can't see the respondents taking the test. One of the major pluses of these methods is how they mirror Arbitron's methodology--- phone contact is made, opinion survey invitation occurs, and the survey takes place in the home. Callout Testing and the Living Room Music Test profile diary keepers---the same kinds of listeners that Arbitron recruits for a ratings survey. Similar to Arbitron, the incentive to participate is to "have one's opinion count." Because of this, monetary incentives are not a factor--- which helps keep the cost of a Callout Test or Living Room Music Test significantly lower than an Auditorium Music Test or Research Facility Test.

Songs To Test

The number of songs you want to test is your decision. Station budget, again, can affect the number of songs tested. If yours is a station spinning 250- 300 library titles, you may not need to test 600 songs. Searching for strong testing songs to add to your library can increase the number of songs you test. If station budget allows you to test 400 songs, where should you begin? Your station's music scheduling software would be a good

place to start. Run a report of the most frequently played titles from the last thirty days--- usually a typical reflection of your station's library. Decide how far down the list you'd like to test from most to least played. You find there's 275 songs, leaving you with 125 songs more to test. If you have a consultant, he/she can aid you in song selection. Songs that have a past history of airplay in your market can be another source. Mediabase can also help you generate song lists based on your own criteria. The idea many stations use when putting a test list together is to find out if what they're currently playing tests strong enough to continue airplay, and if there's anything they're not currently playing that is worthy of airplay.

Implementation

Once you receive your library test results in booklet, spreadsheet, and/or sort program format, it's time to digest/dissect the information and make any necessary changes to your library. Again, if you have a consultant, he/she can be a great asset to your implementation of the data. Since every radio station is different, there is no single set of criteria that apply to all. The objective is to give more airplay to the songs that have the greatest appeal and familiarity with minimal burn. Establishing criteria thresholds will allow a station to sort its music into categories so that songs receive the appropriate heavy, medium, or light rotation. Hourly clocks can be designed to call on your best testing song categories most frequently – exposing perhaps 65% Level 1 Powers and 35% Level 2 Secondary each hour. Custom sorts of cross-tab results (Males 18-24, Females 18-24) often allow a station to make decisions about songs they're 'on the fence' about. Some of these sorts may be layouts of results based on Total Sample, Demo, Gender, and Artist breakdowns.

Maintenance Frequency

Now your radio station's engine has updated clocks (new oil filter) and fresh music rotating (fresh oil) through it. When will your next round of maintenance be? Listener tastes are constantly changing. How valuable do you think it is to stay in step with what your listeners think? Which cost would you rather incur: an investment in timely maintenance of a 'well oiled' radio station or the costly expense of rebuilding the radio station engine that blew up? Will that rebuilt engine be as good as it once was?

Paul Kelly is General Manager of Kelly Music Research, Inc. Since 1991, Philadelphia based Kelly Music Research has been conducting local callout music research and library testing. For more information, reach Paul Kelly at PaulKelly@KellyMusic.com.