

## *A McLook At The Menu by Paul Kelly*

Walk into any McDonalds in the world, and you see their menu of “I’m Lovin’ It” selections. From the various breakfast items to the all day/night sandwich, fries, and salad fare, it’s a menu of selections that consumers keep coming back for. Different parts of the country see some variations on the menu. McRib was available on menus in Florida last year, but back home here in Philadelphia---not to be found. Hmmm. Do you think McDonalds does local research on their menu items? It’s how successful businesses stay successful---keeping the product in step with what the consumers want.

What does your station’s menu (music library) look like? With today’s audio delivery landscape getting more competitive every day (IPOD, satellite, and internet radio listening) it is more crucial than ever that radio keep its music in step with what the listeners want to hear. Once your station is off track and your ratings are falling, it’s even more difficult to get it back on course and drive those numbers back up.

### *Music Research: Convenience or Necessity?*

Imagine you’re driving down the interstate with the family on vacation. There’s the exit ramp with five gas stations staring you in the face. Nope. Not stopping. Plenty of gas to last us a while. Ten miles later, you’re roadside in the heat with no gas, and a car load of griping passengers along for the ride. This short sighted approach led you to believe you’d be just fine when you really weren’t. Unfortunately, this approach exists in business today---including Radio. Many times the sentiment is ‘...the ratings are good. Our station won’t do research until the ratings tank’ (out of gas on the side of the road). You know who those griping passengers are when that happens; DJs, GM, sales people, clients---anyone who’s ‘along for the ride’ with your station. McDonalds doesn’t wait until numbers are off, the drive thru is empty, and there’s a surplus of happy meal prizes. Continuous product research helps McDonalds stay connected with its customers.

### *Menu*

While McDonalds has its way of selecting what menu items to test (current menu items and possible additions), radio also has its way of selecting songs for a music test, even though the goals can be similar. Test songs currently in regular rotation (on the menu), plus get a read on songs you’d consider adding if it’s what the listeners want to hear (possible additions). Use your music scheduling software to run a Most Frequently Played Analysis for the past thirty days. You make the call on how many titles from this analysis need to be tested. If there’s more open slots for testing, consider titles that have history in the market not currently on-air, or that the competition may be playing. Consider Mediabase lists of bell-weather stations similar in sound to your station. If you have a consultant, ask for advice. They are intimately involved with your station, know the goals, and know the market.

### **Method**

Recruitment for all research methodologies continues to become more difficult. Recruitment difficulties are driving cost. Kelly Music Research offers both Auditorium Music Tests (AMT) and the Living Room Music Test. AMTs can be extremely difficult to recruit in the summer and can become quite costly. Summer travel plans make it tough to target one, two, or three dates when all of your recruits can attend. One option is the Living Room Music Test; which allows recruits to complete the test at home on their own schedule. Another option is to test your library using local callout. Depending on the number of titles, you could get through your test list in a matter of weeks.

### **Implementation**

Watching a neighbor assemble a gas grill without using the instructions can be laughable and dangerous at the same time. Seeing ego get in the way of better judgment often leads to failure. When the gas grill explodes on the weekend, hindsight screams: you should have followed the directions. Imagine if a McDonalds manager believes the research is wrong, and decides adding McTacos to the menu will drive the numbers higher. Radio stations' numbers can crash and burn when good music test results aren't implemented properly. If there's something you don't understand, ask your consultant. Your research vendor should also be able to provide the guidance you may need.

### **Test Sort**

I've been fortunate enough to sit with different PDs and consultants across the country in all music formats to assist in sorting music tests. It's true that everyone stirs the soup differently. It's eye opening to learn how different minds view a set of data and how best to get the most mileage from it. Projected Turnover Analysis from your music scheduling software can help you arrive at the song counts your categories need to maximize exposure of your highest scoring titles. These rotations and song counts can help you arrive at the total song count you'll need. Stations around the country are dividing their music into categories based on era, artist, or just simply powers and sub powers. Song appeal score determines what titles go in the library, while others sort based solely on Like A Lot/Like scores. Some stations use an individual score that combines appeal, burn, and familiarity; providing a full picture perspective of a song, while also looking at each of those scores as well. Additional breakout info based on gender, P1/P2, target demo, and artist tend to be deciding factors when programmers are on the fence with a particular track.

### **Menu Follow-Up**

Know that as McDonalds tracks the results of its research implementation (sale counts), radio stations need to keep an eye on the results of its research implementation (rotation analysis). Give the library a couple weeks to rotate, then run the analysis. If your

rotations aren't what they should be, dig in to find out why. Could it be breakable/unbreakable rules (artist separation, mood, tempo, daypart, etc.) that have a choke hold on your rotations and your TSS (time spent scheduling)? If a better part of your day is spent manually scheduling your music, call your consultant, research vendor, or tech support for scheduling solutions. Too much manual scheduling can lead a station down the wrong path.

### **Do It Again?**

Like that McDonalds menu that consumers enjoy, and keeps them coming back, your radio station's menu/library needs to be maintained and freshened. How often? Depending on what your budget allows, and how competitive your market is can help answer that question. Music research helps keep successful radio stations on track and drive ratings. Safe to say, at least one library test a year can help keep your station from running out of fuel. But the more times you refuel the station with a music test, the less likely it will be to run out of gas.