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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Zainal Abidin Ibrahim; Haji Md Noordin Hamzah</td>
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Country Paper
Malaysia (RTM)

By

Zainal Abidin Iberahim
and
Hj. Md. Noordin Hamzah
COUNTRY PAPER : MALAYSIA (R.T.M)

SEMINAR ON RADIO BROADCAST MANAGEMENT 2000
PROGRAMME TRENDS & PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

Prepared by:

Zainal Abidin Iberahim
Director of Broadcasting
Radio 3.

Hj. Md. Noordin Hamzah
Engineer,
Training Division,
Tun Abdul Razak Broadcasting Institute.
THE SITUATION NOW

Born in 1946 Radio Malaysia or Radio Malaya as it was then called grew from strength to strength to its present populations of about 2500 personnel servicing 4 national networks, 12 regional stations (including 8 sub-stations) one music channel (covering the peninsular) and the "SUARA MALAYSIA" (overseas broadcast).

Basically the structure of operation now is the double-tier broadcasting, the first being the national networks and the second, regional (state) stations serving the needs of the local population.

Radio 4, 5 and 6 broadcast in English, Chinese and Tamil respectively while the rest of the stations use Bahasa Melayu.

Primarily all the station broadcast a pot-pouri of programmes serving a cross-section of the population. News every hour on the hour, entertainment programme (mostly the DJ's would air songs and chit-chat a bit in between) a bit of documentary, religious programmes concentrated mostly at dawn and dusk and on Fridays (the Muslim's holy day), a bit of sports here and there, live coverage of major national events now and then plus a few other recorded ones.

LISTENERSHIP
Total radio listeners in the country is on the increase and we recorded the highest compared to a few other countries in the region.

Domestically over 8.5 adults (aged 15+) tune in to radio on a weekly basis (86.2 of adult population) and increase of 4% since last year's survey.
CHANGING SCENARIO

A country that was once dependent on agriculture, Malaysia is moving forward together with its neighbour's into the era of industrialisation.

The changing tastes and lifestyle of the people and the 'globalization process' that is happening now requires parallel change in the broadcast media.

The 'privatisation' policy being practised in the country now together with the conscious approach towards innovation and quality requires RTM not only to and act think like a corporate body but also to behave and perform like one. There lies the paradox.

In March of this year the Malaysian Cabinet rejected a proposal put forward by the Economic Planning Unit to corporatise RTM.
A detailed and careful study done over 2 years with the help of consultants was turned down for the simple reason that the purpose of its existence was not to make money but to serve the people and therefore the government. There lies the task.

THE TASK

To put it in a nutshell the work ahead is to help the government in achieving vision 2020. I wouldn't propose that we talk about what 2020 is all about because it took the PM himself more than an hour to present it. But basically to be an industrialised country and still hold to the moral, ethical and universal values of what is good, by the year 2020.

THE CHALLENGE

1. The most important would be to translate and assimilate the country's vision into radio programming. The population must be made to understand and participate in the process.

2. To operate Radio Malaysia in the mould of a corporate entity whilst still being a government department. Coupled with that would be conscious a conscious approach towards being commercially viable. A private company has been engaged since June 1990 to handle the marketing section of radio. Radio programmes that are commercially viable would be privatised in the near future.
3. With the present strength of about 2500 people, salary alone covers about more than two third of the yearly budget. Please be reminded that being a government department for all fo 47 years, the way we operate is a little bit different from the public sector. There is need to shed of this extra weight. The recently set up human resources dept. is doing a study towards this end. The workforce will be adjusted, retrained and redeployed in the various specialised aspect to meet the new structures requirements.

4. The DJ's have always been the frontliners of any radio station. A more stringent intake procedure have been introduced to ensure that only the capable ones are enlisted. This would include a written examination, a practical (studio work) test and an interview session.

5. Other areas of restructuring involves the setting up of the
Marketing and Audience Research Unit, programme Research and Development, Documentation and Public Relations.

6. BEAUTY AND THE BEST

A vigorous exercise in injecting new life in the once lethargic Radio Malaysia was done since 1990 which involve the twin-prong approach of Beautiful-On-Air and Beautiful On-The-Ground.

The Beautiful-On-Air approach is termed the 'hot-clock' whereby teams comprising the producer, DJ and a song selector would sit down and prepare details of what is going to be aired for slots of 4 hour durations. It entails the meticulous effort in juggling news, government message and popular songs in an effort to attract listeners. A mission statement "RTM Teman Setia Anda" (Your Loyal Companion) have been rigorously promoted to endear the station to its listeners and well as our TV audience.

The Beautiful On The Ground exercise involves the appointment of Penghlus (chieftains) from amongst the staff to undertake the beautification, security, comfort welfare and cleanliness programme for their respective workplace. The Penghlus are elected by vote from amongst their peers and holds the post for 2 years.
ENGINEERING DEVELOPMENT

RTM present development plan involves the refurbishing and upgrading of programme production and transmission facilities. RTM is now in Phase Three i.e. the final stage in the implementation of FM Stereo Transmission Network throughout the country. On the completion of this phase the expected population coverage of Peninsular Malaysia will be 95% and for Sabah and Sarawak will be 85%. RTM has set up a Committee to make study on introduction of audio digital system for Radio Studios and Contiles. Although the Malaysian Satellite will be launched in 1995, RTM will only consider introducing Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) when the technology is available cheaply to all its listeners.

TRAINING

Tun Abdul Razak Broadcasting Institute (IPTAR), the training arm of RTM, can no longer completely satisfy the increasing needs of the department as a whole because there is an urgent need to train managers, marketing officers and researchers in the field of broadcasting as compared to the needs of the engineers, technicians and programme producers in their basic skills. Managing training for broadcast managers, should indeed be given priority if we are to survive and win in the ever increasing challenges of getting the audience, in the open market of media competition. The forecast for broadcast training will have to be based on the ever changing environment and more sophisticated equipment, and demand of quality from the listeners.
THE OUTLOOK

With the coming of TV4 sometime next year competition for the audience would be even stiffer. The 90's would be an era of change for Radio Malaysia but suffice to say that with the vision of the top leadership we will be ready for it.