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<th>Radio programming in a multi-media age: the Singapore radio industry.</th>
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Deutsche Welle - AMIC
Seminar on

RADIO PROGRAMMING
IN A MULTIMEDIA AGE

COUNTRY PAPER – SINGAPORE

jointly organised by

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Deutsche Welle Radio Training Centre
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and

amic-
Asian Media Information
and Communication Centre (AMIC)

River View Hotel, Singapore
AMIC-DW SEMINAR

RADIO PROGRAMMING IN A MULTI-MEDIA AGE

THE SINGAPORE RADIO INDUSTRY

SUBMITTED BY

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RADIO CORPORATION OF SINGAPORE

MAY 10-15, 1999
1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the current broadcasting situation in Singapore, state of multimedia, radio programming and expected changes, problems foreseen and responses planned.

2. RADIO BROADCASTING

Radio broadcasting began in Singapore in 1936 with AM transmission. This was followed by FM in the early 70s, first in mono and later in stereo. There are over 1 million radio receivers in Singapore and it reaches out to a weekly listenership of about 2.5 million. Radio undoubtedly is still one of the most accessible and important information and entertainment media to accompany to work or leisure pursuits at home, in the office or on the move.

3. ROLE OF RADIO IN SINGAPORE

Besides informing, educating and entertaining its listeners, programmes are broadcast to cater to the listening needs of the different communities and age groups. By giving listeners what they want, radio has to stay relevant. On the news front, journalists and their news editors work round the clock to inform listeners of the latest developments at home and abroad.

Drivers tune in to RCS’ Traffic Watch for reliable traffic reports. A collaborative effort with the Land Transport Authority, Traffic Police and Meteorological Service, Traffic Watch has indeed become THE authority for traffic reports since its launch in March 1997.
To stay relevant, radio ensures that they meet their clients’ needs. Advertisers are kept abreast of Radio’s strengths and listenership through radio conferences and seminars. These events help to build good rapport with clients.

4. THE RADIO INDUSTRY IN SINGAPORE

There are 18 radio stations originating from Singapore:

(a) the Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS) is a media company that owns and operates the largest radio network in Singapore. It has 12 FM radio stations catering to the multi-racial Singapore population and 3 international SW radio stations. It is estimated that advertisements on RCS stations account for almost 90% of radio’s advertising pie.

(b) SAFRA Radio is owned by the Singapore Armed Forces. It owns and operates 2 FM radio stations.

(c) NTUC Radio Heart is owned by the National Trade Union Congress. It owns and operates 2 FM radio stations.

(d) the National Arts Council, in collaboration with RCS, owns and operates the Arts Channel.

Singaporeans can also tune in to the BBC WORLD SERVICE as well as to a number of Malaysian radio stations.
(a) RCS has launched 2 new radio stations and re-formatted one of its existing radio station. To cater to the growing needs of Singaporeans, a NEWS radio station was launched by RCS. In addition to this news station, an International radio station - broadcasting in Japanese, German and French has been launched - to cater to the growing number of foreigners working and living in Singapore.

5. INTERNET RADIO

Although radio stations in Singapore are primarily making use of airwaves for their broadcasts, they have embraced the evolution of the Internet two years ago. The websites of the RCS stations receive an average of 10 million hits every month. RCS has also launched the Singapore "Live" Radio Network where its radio stations can be heard around the world via the internet. Through this service, Singaporeans abroad will have another link back to their home.

6. MULTIMEDIA UNIT

The multimedia unit is an integral part of broadcasting for radio stations. They provide a magnitude of diverse projects, services and support, websites, intranet, e-commerce, print, presentation and CD-ROM for internal and external clients.

Since all the radio stations in RCS have their own websites, the multimedia unit assists with the building and maintenance of these sites to ensure consistency and quality across the different stations.

Some of the facilities which our websites provide to listeners:

a. requests for songs
b. ‘chats’
c. participation in contests related to programmes on air
d. schedule of radio programmes
e. information on DJs and producers
f. special promotions

7. DIGITAL AUDIO BROADCAST

The FM transmission system introduced in 1949 has reached its technical limitations. This band of frequencies is already overcrowded. Existing services are prone to interference, fading and other reception problems. It is difficult to achieve optimum reception at fixed locations, and near impossible in a vehicle as FM was never designed for mobile reception.

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) solves these problems. It guarantees CD-like quality broadcasts to all receivers and is extremely rugged for mobile reception. It provides more room for new programmes in the future. DAB is multimedia and allows broadcasting of other information such as data, texts and pictures from song titles to consumer information, from traffic and weather reports to stock exchange quotations.

7.1 DAB Applications

During the trial period, both RCS and SAFRA Radio simulcast two of their existing FM stations. In its soft-launch of the project RCS carries four existing stations and a Showcase Channel which showcases its other stations. Eventually in Singapore, all existing FM stations may be simulcast on DAB, as SBA will guarantee them places on DAB. RCS is also considering launching new DAB-only stations for niche

The new bandwidth assigned to DAB may allow more radio channels to be launched even if all existing FM channels are simulcast on DAB. DAB could accommodate up to 40 to 50 radio channels compared to 19 FM channels available today.

7.2 Challenges of DAB

The main challenge is that the take-up rate of DAB receivers and hence the reach of DAB services may be low. This would limit its advertising and subscription revenue potential. Since local broadcasters have to continue FM broadcasting for 10 to 15 years, it may be difficult to recoup their investment in DAB in the short to medium term. As a result, existing broadcasters would seriously have to look at new revenue from value-added services to help recoup their DAB investment.

8. OTHER EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

Radio has to face continuing competition from other media like television, internet, newspapers etc. Singapore Telecoms and Singapore Cable Vision have come up with new media models where Singaporeans can enjoy a wide range of activities from watching movies to shopping on the internet.

9. CONCLUSION

While new technology presents new opportunities, there are challenges to grapple with and concerns that need to be addressed. However, the ability to embrace these challenges to bring about radio listening to a new level of experience for listeners will determine the status of radio in the world as we journey into the 21st Century.
The information for this paper was obtained from the following sources:


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