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Managing Radio Production & Transmission Schedules
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Start with Stations’ Multi-media Presentation (A 5 minute multi-media presentation on SAFRA Radio's two stations’ positioning, image, 40% growth in ratings, types of promotions done, and a short brief on News and Sports coverage.)

Short introduction on our 2 radio stations Power98FM, a 24-hour English music radio station and Dongli88.3FM, our 24-hour Mandarin music station. The brief covered the two radio stations' positioning, format, rank position & ratings, audience profile & etc. Both stations target at the 18 to 34 year olds, with a key focus on the 20somethings. Power 98FM is Singapore’s 3rd most listened to English Radio Station out of over 10 radio stations available, and ranks 6th in position out of over 19 radio stations in Singapore.

Radio Productions – Let me share with you how Power 98FM manages radio production (with many recorded examples), and the key points to watch out for, depending on what the radio productions are meant to achieve, and targeted at what audience.

Key Points to Note in Managing Radio Production (A Practical Approach):

Firstly, let me qualify my presentation by saying that amongst other fellow radio (and even TV) experts today, I am here to only share with you how Power 98FM manages our radio productions, and where we have been successful. I don’t have all the answers, nor dare I say that everything we do has been successful. We’ve had our fair share of failed attempts at radio productions too!! Let’s set our perimeters as a platform where we can share our experiences together, and use this great opportunity to learn from each other in a cross-cultural way.

Secondly, let me define my perimeters for dealing with this topic of managing radio production at SAFRA Radio, and specifically focusing on Power 98FM. Being a fellow practitioner like all of you, I will approach this entire session from a purely pragmatic approach. Therefore, my definition of radio production refers to any radio production, which the station does such as programmes, information capsules, station promotions and commercials.
Thirdly, let’s determine the current environment which we all operate in, namely to have some understanding of what some of the challenges are for radio in the new millennium.

a. The Competitive Environment! Let’s face up with the awful truth that both the advertisers and the consumers are now spoilt for choices with new and improved media alternatives:

- Entry of new media (such as internet [21.8% to 29.7% - AC Nielson survey on media alternative to radio], cable TV, electronic billboards);

- Explosion of technological development resulting in improved media such as digital TV, Internet radio.

- New/improved forms of quality entertainment such as LDs, DVDs, MP3 players (increase from 17.4% to 23.7% - AC Nielson survey on media alternative to radio)

- More clutter, more “noise” and therefore harder sometimes for messages to cut through the clutter of various medias all screaming for attention.

- All of the above, fighting for a share of the listeners’ time & attention, and for the advertisers’ dollars makes it even more challenging for not just radio, but all media to compete in this ever-changing media scene.

b. The enlightened consumers/listeners have also become more discerning and demanding with quick access to global information – hence they have much higher expectations, and are more easily bored or distracted.

c. It therefore becomes critical for radio to stay relevant, and be very focused and in tune with understanding the consumer/listeners, their psychological and behavioral patterns, fitting radio and radio productions into their lifestyles and staying relevant – or you lose them – and it becomes harder to woo them back.
How does Power 98FM manage our radio production effectively to ensure that our messages get across effectively? How do we continue to draw the type of audience whom we wish to reach?

- **Know your station’s image and positioning** and stay focused on this. Eg. The style, sound and type of radio promotions, which we do. Power 98FM is a music station, reaching out to the 18 to 34s and focusing on the 20somethings. We’ve always projected ourselves as fun, creative and a little irreverent. Hence, when we do our productions, we consciously stay focused on our image and positioning (station for the 20somethings). **Example** of station promotion of “Six on the Beach” (Track 1). Another Example on staying focused on our positioning: A key positioning for the station is “No other station brings the movies to you like we do”, because we are aware that 20somethings watch a lot of movies. Hence, we ensure that in whatever movie trailer, movie production and etc we do, we consistent reinforce the same message. (Example of Movie trailer on Mission Impossible (Track 2)) We go so far as to remind all our DJs constantly that if they receive phone-calls from young kids, they should not put them out as far as possible to continue to maintain our image that we’re a station for the 20somethings!

- **Know your target audience, and focus on that when doing your scripting and productions**, and ensure that you speak in a lingo, or language, which they would understand. Be mindful always of whom our audience is and ensure that its pitched at that level. We differentiate the type of radio productions we do for our slightly younger audiences in the nights, vs. our slightly more mature audience in the morning and evening drives. Eg. of Friday the 13th Top 40 Countdown (Track 3), vs. the Tim and Shareen’s latest EDT promotion, which reaches a more mature audience. (Track 4).

- **Keep your objective/message focused, and simple, and not try to say too many things at any one time.** Don’t ever, ever bring a print ad and put it up to the microphone!! Remember radio does not usually have the luxury of 100% of the listeners’ attention, because radio is mobile and flexible. Hence, listeners tend to be doing something else at the same time, while listening to radio. Therefore, keep scripts simple and conversational, so that listeners absorb the information you put out easily and quickly. It is also important to do it creatively, so that you arrest the listeners’ attention and make them pause to listen to you more closely, or to turn up the volume just to listen to your interesting production. Eg of the Speak Good English Campaign (Tracks 5 & 6). This series was done depicting common funny situations where we catch ourselves using Singlish. The “correct” way of saying the same things is done still with a natural local accent, but in acceptable English. This is done deliberately so as not to alienate the listeners from us, and cause them to “switch off” especially if we end up sounding
“preachy” instead of “tongue-in-cheek”; Eg. Radio production on dental healthcare (Track 7). Again, it is not the case that an encouragement to keep healthy dental habits must sound boring. This series was done using many sound effects which listeners could easily identify with such as the drill, brushing of teeth, gurgling of mouthwash, failed whistle of someone without front teeth, but all combined with an easy to relate with script.

- **Know what it is you wish to achieve through the radio production;** what emotions we wish to evoke when your listeners hear the production. Eg of Movie production - “Haunted” which evoked curiosity, and a sense of mystery (Track 8); Eg of the Texas radio production on road safety rules and not speeding. The production was a very powerful, very emotive production, using the last “live” recording of a child named Jonah with his father in the car, where his father taught him about the dangers of not observing traffic safety rules “by accident”. (Track 9).

**Creativity & Relativity**
- Radio is a wonderful medium, its very personal, and extremely versatile. Therefore, **be creative and daring and optimize the impact of the theatre of sound in people’s minds** – don’t limit your imagination, and don’t think that something is “too hard” or too complicated, or that this is too silly and ludicrous. Allow your creativity to breathe and take life.

- Take for example Power98FM’s latest on-air 1st ever radio drama cum radio game/promotion, which was a careful orchestration of a number of on-air characters which were created, and who appeared across all timebelts, namely, the “hero” of the series, “Huat Ah Huat”. We created this character who began to appear in all our various DJs timebelts, irritating them in various realistic and interesting ways, which listeners can easily relate with. We then had the character “murdered” over the weekend, and turned all our DJs into suspects. This led us to Great Radio Game called “Who Hit Huat”, where listeners had to guess who the murderer was, what weapon was used, and where the hideous murder was committed. In addition, we also produced a special “Die Huat I” radio series, where a character - Scotland Yard’s finest “Ms Charlotte Webb” was commissioned to investigate the murder.

- What we achieved with this was to build a strong familiarity of our DJs with the audience across all timebelts (cross promos across timebelts); build Time Spent Listening through clues given regularly and chance to pick up $9800; cross promote our website and increase the web impressions, and above all, project the station as a fun and creative station for the 20somethings. This series of production also leveraged on the theatre of sound and letting imagination run...
wild. In addition, it allowed us opportunities to do product placements within the series! (We had our concerns when we were brainstorming this, because of the heavy amount of planning, research, creative script writing and production required to do this – but we just bit the bullet, and carried on.) Examples of Who Hit Huat, Tracks 10,11 (Episode 2), 12 (Episode 6). For more information, log onto power98.com.sg.

- Following on from this, don’t take away the magic of radio – use sound to tickle the imagination, get ideas from real life incidents, get local - so that your listeners can identify with you (unless of course you need to broadcast regionally – then it’s a slightly different ball game). As in the above Ah Huat murder. Most of the creative came from very ordinary everyday things that happen around us (like Suzanne Walker with spinach stuck on her teeth), but dramatized on radio. Again, optimize the theatre of sound, and use it to maximum advantage – Hasbro Board Game, True or False example (Track 13) – very powerful sound effects used.

- Give them a reason for listening to your radio programme, commercial or even public service announcements. If you bother to put it out, then we have to ensure that listeners will benefit from listening, not just “do it because I’ve been asked to do so”, not just because its on schedule.

- Keep radio productions simple and conversational. This is important because you don’t usually have the luxury of 100% of the listeners’ concentration at any one time. Therefore keeping copy as simple and active as possible will ensure that your message gets through better.

- Promote, Promote, Promote! If we bother to produce, then we should bother to promote what we produce. Let your listeners know when exactly your radio productions are going to come on, what time to expect it. Promote it beyond your radio medium, on your website, e-newsletters, in magazines, in print and on TV (if you can afford it).

- Above all, you must have passion and fun in what you do, or you start to lose touch with your audience.

Scheduling of radio productions, promos, songs, programmes and how Power 98FM manages this.
Ask any radio listener what time they listen to the radio, and they are likely to rattle off their day’s schedule to identify what time it is that they really listen to radio by choice.

- **Radio listening is basically very lifestyle driven.** Therefore to do effective radio scheduling is to understand firstly your targeted audience’s lifestyle habits, and schedule your programmes, music, commercials and radio productions to “reach and hit” them when they are most receptive to wanting to listen.

- **Radio listening is also habitual,** especially on weekdays, and it’s often not surprising to find listeners keeping track of their day’s activities through our radio programmes (give simple example of driving on the roads, if reach Orchard rd, and its still Daily Bread, then they’re not late, if its Sports On which happens at 8.30am –then they’re late!!). Therefore it helps for listeners to get some predictability through the way we schedule our news, sports, familiar benchmarks, top of the hour etc.

- While radio's key strengths are its mobility, flexibility and speed, its downside is that people tend to be doing something else while listening to radio. Hence, in radio scheduling, the frequency with which we put out our information becomes important to ensure that the listener hears us.

Bearing the above in mind, key points to note in scheduling include:

**Target Audience:** Understand the types of target audience listening in to you, at various times of the day.

- Take the *scheduling of radio commercials* for example. The beauty of radio is that it offers advertisers a fairly concentrated reach of specific types of audience (targeted marketing) – by age group, professions, what time they are likely to listen – which means more targeted reach through optimal placement of advertisements at the correct time-belts. Therefore, clients can create different productions for different target audience, and place them for greater effectiveness. A fine example of this is actually Yahoo – who created a series of different radio adverts, to reach different audiences, which are then carefully scheduled during the times where their target audiences are most likely to be listening in. Another example of effective scheduling – DHL and their pickup times. A series of spots was specially placed to ensure that users were reminded to call DHL before...
their last pickup time. Scheduling to call for action or driving “traffic” to stores at particular hours becomes important and if well placed, extremely effective.

- **In scheduling music for example**, we conscious play more familiar tunes during the Morning Drive Time and Evening Drive Time because of the older age group profile listening in at those hours, and get more daring in the nights in introducing new songs because the audience is younger and more receptive to “new” songs.

- **In “scheduling” or selecting the right DJs** for the right audience at the various time-belts eg. Morning Drive Time and “You Asked For It” in the nights.

**Note the likely “mood of the day” based on the lifestyle of your listeners.** Though Power’s music format is Contemporary Hits Radio (CHR), we are conscious of these “moods”, and therefore would weed out songs, which are too loud for the late nights, or play more cheerful, lively songs in the mornings. Weekend scheduling of programmes – eg. Acid Jazz and Soul Hour on Saturday nights because of our 20something target audience, and their likely lifestyle on Saturdays.

**Scheduling to ensure you build Time Spent Listening (TSL).** Hence, benchmarks are deliberately set to keep listeners with us for as long as possible, without them losing interest. (Give example of Daily Bread in MDT, and “Guess the Mystery Person” in EDT). Scheduling a particularly familiar or especially favourite song immediately after a popular programme segment is another way of pulling TSL to keep listeners from switching – eg. after X-Fools or after a Who Hit Huat episode.

**Scheduling to ensure that you build up key station positioning.** At Power 98FM for example, we built up and strengthen our sports positioning through scheduling out sports news every hour on the half hour mark to differentiate our sports news from our regular news times and get listeners into the habit of watching out for our sports news at the half hour mark. Sports focus is also to attract a higher male audience profile. Again along this line, to ensure that listeners remember that we play “Today’s Hit Music” we created a series of stations promotions comprising of a montage of the brand of music we play, which are refreshed and updated regularly, to strengthen this positioning. This is scheduled “heavily” at a frequency of once an hour at least. (to play example of station promotion – Track 14)
At the end of the day, the key difference is that whether you’re producing radio programmes or scheduling them, you need to understand your target audience well, be very focused in what you want to achieve, and be ruthless in staying true to yourself. Because once you lose focus, you lose sight of what your station means to your listeners.