
THE EMERGENCE OF RADIO

Broadcasting in India is speedily shifting its profile. Indian radio is currently changing from a government monopoly to highly commercialized broadcasting. As India opens its skies to private FM radio broadcasters, listeners are beginning to wipe the dust off an estimated 150 million radio sets across the country.

Bidding for listeners' ears are a host of media groups across India, including Rupert Murdoch's STAR, media conglomerate Times of India (owned by Bennett and Coleman), the India Today group and the Mid-day group. Each wants a slice of an advertising pie estimated to be worth Rs. 80 billion (about \$1.63 billion). Globally, radio accounts for about 5 - 12 per cent of the total advertising expenditure of the country, with the US, Canada and Spain having high volumes. As a percentage of the total advertising spend of the country, spending on radio is a miniscule 2 per cent, despite its vast reach. The principal reason for this is the higher popularity of television as a mass medium as compared to radio.

Besides offering quality entertainment fare to listeners, private FM channels offer advertisers access to distinctly urban listenership with significant spillage. FM radio is also an important out-of-home medium for commuters caught in traffic, etc.

Radio is on. As an advertising medium, as a means of entertainment and as a possible vehicle to involve the listener with one's message and brand. Many organisations have recognised that radio offers a key way of delivering 'controlled' messages, regularly, to well-defined target audiences. As an 'invisible' medium, radio has become an intimate, authoritative and highly effective medium.

The value of radio as a potential medium for public relations messages is substantial. For one thing, radio offers the most direct way to reach a targeted audience.

- In a print interview, you must depend on the interpretation of a third party - the reporter - to interpret accurately your views to the public.
- In a TV interview, your message runs the risk of being short-circuited by such extraneous factors as looks, lighting or nervousness
- But in a radio interview, where there is no interloper to interpret your message, nor an invasive camera to scrutinize your appearance - a listener must focus on your words, its meaning and significance.

PR professionals can work closely with radio stations to understand their audiences and the programmes they listen to. With this knowledge and through broadcast journalists, presenters and production staff, PR practitioners can use radio to communicate key messages to target

audiences. Through specific targeting, radio can generate a direct response, therefore forms a cost- effective part of any PR campaign.

Due to the diversity of listeners, and programmes, there are many ways to communicate key messages via radio, including:



Interviews - involving a spokesperson and presenter discussing key issues



News-bytes - which are aimed predominant at news bulletins, comprising pre-record material



Competitions - this is an efficient way targeting specific audiences to achieve effective branding and product placement



Audio features - which can be pre-record allowing presenters to incorporate them in their programmes



Fax-wire - this is the most effective way generate coverage, by faxing tailored releases to newsrooms, presenters and product teams



Sampling - sending presenters and key members of production teams samples gimmicks is an effective way of gaining product coverage

Promotional activities are the fastest growing aspect of radio. Promotions can be done in a number of ways, through coverage during particular programmes, via competitions and roadshows, all of which increase product awareness to specific target audiences.

Not for nothing is radio called "the theatre of the mind". Can you get your audience to imagine things? Go back to your own childhood before 1982. Could you not imagine how Bjorn Borg served, how John McEnroe threw his racquet, how Sunil Gavaskar batted or how Denis Lillee bowled. You could. You were seeing it through radio. Now can you make your listeners imagine a few things? Can you evoke pictures? A cup of steaming tea on a wintry morning, a glass of deliciously chilled beer on a scorching afternoon, the extra five minutes in bed on a Monday morning...yes, this is the power of radio.

Future of Radio

Bert Goldman, executive vice-president of group owner First Broadcasting Company LP, sees radio becoming more customized to the listener, and especially the listener's location.

"One idea would be to link it up with your GPS," said Goldman. "McDonalds would have an ad for their latest McBurger, and then there would be a digital command sent on over to the radio station that would link up to your Telematics-equipped radio. It would put a tag line on the commercial: 'And the nearest McDonalds is two blocks on your right.'"

That kind of thing might not be too far off, says Michael Wellings, director of engineering at KEXP(FM) in Seattle.

"You will have a digital radio in your car, and a display associated with it," he said. The graphic screen will be a touchscreen on which the listener can reach over and touch a "buy now" button to make a purchase.

"The buy information can be transmitted back to the station in a number of ways," Wellings said. The driver's cell phone is one solution. "Or they could just cue up in the radio, and then you pull into a convenience store to get gas, and there's a local Bluetooth or some connection that senses and downloads whatever you have decided to purchase in the last 100 miles you have been driving."

Goldman says the GPS/radio combination can bring even more.

"If your radio was in a particular part of town, then you would get a button where you would get traffic information linked to approximately where you are in town." Localized news and weather are other possible applications.

"I guess the digital broadcast capabilities are going to help radio to be even more targeted than it currently is," said Goldman. "To my experience, the more targeted you get, the more personal the media becomes, and that is an advantage for people."

Of course, futurists have long touted the possible benefits of value-added data services in radio. These discussions take on new interest, though, with the possibility of IBOC, a digital technology that could open the path to greater use of data.

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