

RADIO PROGRAMMING PHILOSOPHY

By Mike Holder

Phone: (517) 250-1252 • Email: mike@mikeholder.com

I find this one of the toughest things to do – having to put my programming philosophy to paper. The reason I say this is that I operate under no specific terms when it comes to a market. Each one is different in listening habits, ethnic diversity and advertisers. To have a preconceived notion on how a particular radio station should work or sound can often be the ultimate mistake. Since the radio marketplace is ever changing so must programmers be. I have discovered in my experience that every market is different. What works in one market may not work in another. However, there are strong foundations that all great radio stations are built upon and those are the things I most strongly believe in.

First off, as a programmer I found out I have two bosses – neither one being a General Manager or an Operations Manager. To me they are supervisors. The two bosses I refer to are the Listeners and the Advertisers. If you keep harmony with both, then the reward is increased share and increased revenue. When your station is on the air, it should be one that listeners and advertisers say is their radio station because it not only satisfies their radio listening needs, but also reflects the community well.

Second, “stationality” is important in having a successful on air product. You must always keep in mind the direction of your station. If you are the number one station in the market, it's too easy to become distracted by your competitor and lose sight of what it is that makes you number one. If you're the competition you must attack the market leader, you have nothing to lose by trying to flank the station. The stronger the attack the better your chances are that the other guys will lose sight of their main objective. If you are the market leader your competition should be yourself. Find ways of improving the on air sound, come up with better promotions and try to always maintain consistency while reinventing yourself. If you're setting the standard, always keeping raising it, so it makes it that much harder for your competitor to reach that standard.

Third, and very important - promote, promote, promote! Promotions are one of the biggest cornerstones of top-of-mind awareness. This is how radio stations can either live or die when its time for someone to fill out their Arbitron diary. They don't go to the radio and see what station is on; they recall it from memory. To ingrain yourself with the listener you must be the same place the listener is. Make the streets yours! As often as you can take the station vehicle out to a busy street corner and hand out bumper stickers and tapes. Show up at big events to make yourself visible. Take part in parades and community events, even if it's for an hour or two. Take on causes the community is passionate about. The more the listener sees and hears your call letters the better their recall of your station. I've found most jocks don't mind this little extra work (I know I don't), as long as you make it fair and have all the on air staff involved. They want to win just as much as you do.

Next is community involvement. Getting involved with organizations like MDA, Easter Seals, Children's Miracle Network, Salvation Army, local food banks, and Toys for Tots are simple things that don't take up much airtime, sound great on the air, and get you free TV time and press coverage. The more a station gets involved with the community, the more chances it has to make a positive halo effect. After working with these organizations you find your station appearing on telethons and news programs. And all of this just for doing something that the FCC already requires you to do! I have found in most cases most jocks are willing to do this, it's just something they never thought about.

The difference in today's radio marketplace between a good air staff and a great air staff is the Program Director. They must see to it that the air staff has the direction and coaching it needs to be the best in town. You need to understand every person on their air staff. Know their goals, personalities and skill. Work with the air talent on a weekly basis – which sends a message that you care about the product, but most importantly you care about the individuals' career.

Mornings are the most critical day part to a programmer. Get involved with the morning show on a daily basis to help correct delivery, phone calls, bits and over-all content. Offer solutions to problems in the Morning Show and offer to help with daily content ideas. The more a programmer works with his Morning Show the happier he and his jocks will be, because all involved understand what the end product should sound like and what end result will come from it.

The key to all of this is that a good programmer must instill a team attitude. The only way a station can reach its full potential is for everyone to work together as a team. A PD needs to build team spirit in a variety of ways, never forgetting the occasional pat on the back for a job well done. The main responsibility a PD has to the team is to be the **biggest** team player of all. Lead by example. Once a PD falls off the horse the rest of the staff is not far behind. Not only does this effect morale, it can have damaging affects to the on air sound.

The most important thing – keep it fun! It's easy to get caught up in sales meetings, department head meetings, promotion meetings and aircheck meetings. These are important and all part of the daily ritual. However, this cannot become a burden on the fun quotient of the radio station. Most jocks got in to the business because it was just that, fun. Conventional wisdom makes us think we cannot afford to have fun. But remember, we're to lead by example. If the staff sees a PD who's having fun, chances are you'll have a staff that is having fun and sounds like it on the air. Take the fun away and soon you may notice more than just a few jocks heading for the door. Fun is the name of the game! If you really want to succeed and be #1, you must have more fun than any other station in the market.

Radio has changed since I did my first on-air gig at age 5. It was changing then and it's changing now. With things like satellite, voice tracking and 'one name' FMs, the job of a Program Director is becoming easier and harder at the same time. The Programmers that will survive are the ones who not only embrace the changes, but at the same time know how to beat them. The days of a Program Director simply coming into a market, tightening the music and getting a new voice guy are over. You may sound fresher, but by no means better. In order to be better you must have a Program Director who understands that the only way to win is by being local. One who takes every opportunity to celebrate the community in which you live. No satellite or virtual radio station can accomplish that. In fact, there are stations that are live 24 hours and still don't accomplish this.

So could I come in to your market and tweak the music and get a new voice guy? Yes. Would you sound fresher? You might. What I really want to do is help your station sound better. My ultimate goal: to be a Program Director who is known for being insightful, a market innovator and a winner!



MIKE HOLDER

1022 Woodbridge • Jackson, MI 49203-3112
Phone: (517) 250-1252 • Email: mike@mikeholder.com
On the web: <http://talent.mikeholder.com>