



The three things that will make an impact on Radio, on the road to 2010

Congratulations to IMPACT for making an impact on the media scene in India over the last 3 years. Now let me gaze into my crystal globe..not ball because the global perspective is rapidly going to IMPACT on Indian radio but first we should remember the old adage “to see where you are going, first look to see from where you have come”. Globally radio in its developing form was all the things that are the current buzzwords in the technology lexicon. Radio in the beginning was the original wireless technology and the transistor radio of the 60’s was the first mobile wireless technology. So the time mood and platform is right for radio to “morph” with the opportunities of this millennium. So how does Radio in India in 2010 look... ah what do I see, ...I see 3 things...more differentiated content leading to more listeners, leading to more advertisers.. This is not mere crystal gazing, this is very much in our grasp and can become a reality, if only 3 things were to happen..then these are three things that will make an Impact on radio, on the road to 2010.

The First thing:

Policy Change - In the last 7 years of Phase 1 and the last year and half of Phase 2, we are increasingly stuck with more un-differentiated content than ever before. Even semi-differentiated stations are abandoning their bastions and joining the race to become the largest player in the mass market. As a result, overall radio listenership is not growing; in fact we are already fragmenting the listenership further. Two things can change this, first at a policy level - removal of restriction on the number of frequencies owned by a single entity in a single city and removal of the restriction on news and current affairs. Second, the laggards in the current race decide to abandon their quest to be all things to all people and pursue profitable niches that exist in Radio. Even in Phase 2 with the entry of new players with few exceptions no one’s seriously pursued a strategy of a clearly defined target demographics grouping, and even gender being super served 24/7 with relevant finely tuned lifestyle, entertainment ,and music content. Radio will go the way of magazine s, cable television, even pizza that of specialist offerings with clearly defined content. In 2010 there will arguably only be one or two” all things to all people station’s. They will have a little bit of every thing in both content and listeners but they won’t WIN anything. By 2010 dominating virtual communities of viable connected demographics and psychographics will be more important than being number1 overall

The Second Thing:

Technology – Radio in India is evolving after Television unlike elsewhere where TV happened after Radio. Thus the way Radio in India will get consumed is going to different from the way it has been consumed so far. Radio is no longer the ‘mantle-piece’ radio that it once was. It has already moved onto the computer, the mobile phone (which lets face it is basically a radio receiver) and will probably eventually be available on a version of ipod, there is a digital receiver just released in the UK that will unaided store 7 days worth of programming for on demand or time shift listening and soon will be podcasted, streamed and what have you. Out of home listening will boom thanks to increased mobility and you will also see supermarket radios and other platforms for listenership. Radio will move from a passive, background

medium to an active, interactive and visible medium. And the audience not the techies will ultimately decide which technology gets adopted. Radio will need to stay close to it’s heavy users to see what other platforms they are gravitating to and work out how to plug in radio or more correctly the delivery of audio possibly supported by visual content.

The Third Thing

Measurement - The first two will lead to increased penetration of Radio and listenership, but unless there is a robust measurement system, advertisers will hesitate to put big monies on the media. More and more cities need to get covered by the measurement. I foresee the co-existence of multiple measurement systems in different markets. So the smaller markets can do with DAR, the mini metros will use the Dairy Method and the bigger markets will adopt the more evolved measurements like PDA diaries, electronic measurements devices , watch meters etc.

It goes without saying that for all of the above to happen, broadcasters need to keep aside their own immediate quarter focused ‘short term’ orientation and work towards larger interests of the medium itself. Industry issues must not be treated like strategic advantages . A spirit of ‘ Co-opetition’ cooperating while competing must prevail to take the media forward.

The above three things appear to take the onus of developing Radio as a medium away from the broadcasters and media owners to external change agents which is incorrect and not the intention. On the media owners, lie the bigger responsibility of growing their own listenership, of creating communities for commerce. And herein lies the challenge. The questions that everyone needs to address with clarity is

- What do they want to listen?
- Where would they like to listen?
- How much would they like to listen?
- When would they like to listen?
- And most importantly, why should they listen to your station?

What makes it more exciting that listeners themselves do not know the answers to some of these questions and even if they knew, they are subject to change their minds frequently. Anyone who can consistently answer some or most of these questions will emerge the winner. Trends, before they become trends start off as fads. Predicting and backing the fad that might become the next big trend before anyone else, probably is the only way of staying ahead in this game.



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