



'Radio today is certainly moving in the right direction'

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There are some serious relationship issues between radio operators and the Music industry, but as long as they resolve to be reasonable and the current restrictive trade practice by one of them is revised, I am sure this issue will go away. Advertising is bursting to live on radio; people are now hungry for more new offerings, financial markets are now even more curious... with all this, who can complain?

Radio has already taken its step forward. More radio stations need to be licensed and launched. FM's very restrictive but highly local connect will need to replicate in small and even smaller locales to truly reach its potential.

Coming together on common ground of radio and music industries; more dependence on alternative formats that are less dependent on music; multiple station licensing within one city to the same licensed groups with clearly stated and enforced differentiation parameters; a credible measurement system that can truly reflect listenership (regardless of the perceived quality of the product) unlike the current system (that allows average product to screech ahead based on higher marketing spends and brand recall) – these are all factors. Top it all with an expanded will to push the envelope on radio; expansion of the industry is an eventuality and not a probability.

Going forward, FM Radio in India will need to market themselves as a commodity product for 'Brand Hygiene' and Tactical Activation, using differentiators to offer brands a 360 experience, delivering the desired TA to a brand. We need to educate media planners on the 'incomplete' factor that will surround their proposed plan without radio. This means the client who was until now deprived of an entire 360 approach will have radio bombarding them with value proposition of a full 360 approach.

What we call differentiation strategies today, in 2010, will just be recognized as a menu card of formats that station managements will choose from to suit their audience and markets. The strategy will exist as the choosing of the menu item and then doing that well.

So by 2010, the Indian radio industry will be a vibrant and flourishing media vehicle that will surely compliment and, in some cases compete, with the frontrunners like print and TV. There will be more new technology delivering more

forms of audio and video content. Radio will start looking more like an audio service, moving beyond the airwaves, which will embrace these new distributions means. Radio and audio content will super-serve niche audiences on multiple platforms so there will be FM frequencies dedicated towards particular formats. The future will also see strong radio conglomerates taking shape, with smaller community radio groups taking on the tough questions and radio becoming the primary vehicle as a platform for national discourse.

The programming side of radio will witness more talk and genre-based music format stations specializing in niche content, that will also fall under the ongoing differentiation debate. A much more mature and evolved listener base and talent pool will take the quality of programming to a new level of entertainment that is not related to music. 'Radio Manners' will be as common as common sense and those that perfect this will sound better. News will sprinkle most formats but a few will dominate with it as the stated format. With global weather patterns making weather unpredictable, perhaps weather related reports would also add a splash of rain and sunshine into a broadcast day... add to that the increasing traffic woes and better road systems.

In terms of competition, radio in 2010 will have a lot to offer. Competing more as a mass-market vehicle or a targeted mass-market platform with a local reach, competing with the dominant players of other forms of media such as print, TV and the Internet related distribution channels. Small markets will have their version of the phase II, like the metro cities have had with new players doing it better and more efficiently. Advertising spends will increase inherently but more takers will keep the radio industry challenged for a good fight of the bigger pie. The winners would be those who have learnt early to keep overheads low.

Better measurement systems in place to handle the different formats need to come in. One size will not fit all, so the measurement matrix will differ for each format. As radio has endured the test of time, it will still be popular in its traditional form regardless of new technologies that will cluster bomb the market place.

The Indian radio industry has many surprises for its listeners; some of it is yet to unfold now. With time and more players entering this sector, the radio industry, by 2010, will be part of life and here to stay.

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