



# 'Where else will creative people have so much flexibility and fun?'

In its second (some would argue third) *avatar*, Indian radio, in the last two years, has certainly grown in stature and importance as an effective and efficient medium of communication.

While the potential of scale still has to be translated by the 200 more stations yet to be set up, the initial feedback on whether it is through increased advertiser usage or the 50 per cent growth of the medium convincingly portrays a residual strength and vibrancy of the medium.

Having said that, it is imperative to do a bit of navel gazing at this stage and ask ourselves what the critical success factors for this medium in the coming years are. And the following clearly leap to notice:

### 1. Further deregulation of the FM policy:

Clearly, the time has come for next level changes in the FM policy. If the medium has to grow further it can only do so with new genres of content driving increased penetration. And new genres can only come if the government allows news and current affairs on FM and multiple license ownership in each city. This will give an impetus to radio owners to try out niche and special content formats by applying economies of scale within cities. International examples suggest a 15 per cent increase in overall listener ship when news is added as a format.

### 2. Influx of quality talent:

The Radio Industry, similar to other fast growing industries, has been suffering from a dearth of talented people. Mediocrity is largely the order of the day and having listened to two hours of radio a day classifies as high-end radio experience. And those who have a modicum of experience have unfortunately been allowed to grow far beyond their levels of competence.

The good news is that the last two years have seen the entry of some bright people from other fields into radio. Today these people, with wide spread experience in other industries and with the added radio exposure of the last two years, are all set to catapult the FM industry into a professional league which had been missing so far.

However, the industry still needs to work hard at attracting and retaining good people. It needs to build a professional, people oriented environment - especially one that allows creativity to flourish and where performance is recognized.

Radio programming is one of the most exciting, challenging and rewarding creative functions, largely because it is immediate, deals with one of the most powerful senses – audio; and is all about the theatre of the mind. Where else will creative people have so much flexibility and fun? In radio they are being given an opportunity to play with people's imaginations and direct their emotions with the best tools – music, sound and words!

This facet needs to be showcased by the industry, if it is serious about attracting topnotch talent.

### 3. Evangelizing Radio:

Radio, because of multiple reasons like easy and cheap availability, poor marketing, low rates etc. has invariably been treated as a third cousin to the more glamorous TV and Print media.

Lack of any effort on the part of its stake holders to propagate its efficacy and fickle regulatory policies which have been its bane have further atrophied its standing.

To build stature for the medium is a critical task that lies in front of all of us. It is important that each station owner not only sell his brand but also sell the power of the medium to marketers and advertisers. Radio has demonstrated its efficacy in getting some of the highest response rates to promotions - it has a huge personal connect with consumers and immense power to build brands. However, all information on this is anecdotal at best. There is poor measurement and even poorer marketing of the power of radio. A good start has been made by the industry getting together with TAM and creating a credible measurement system in the diary panel set up of RAM. It is important that this system be allowed to flourish and grow if we want advertisers to see for themselves the effectiveness of advertising on radio.

The industry then needs to work out more ways of showcasing radio and becoming evangelizers rather than mere sellers of the medium. It is indeed time that the entire industry got together and made a concerted push to build the medium lest it becomes yet another chapter in the long history of Indian radio's saga of Paradise Lost... once more!



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